

*SELAH:*

**THE TRINITARIAN, CONTEMPLATIVE, BIBLICAL LIFE  
OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

**A THESIS**

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**BY**

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With deep gratitude for those with whom I continue to grow into this *Selah* life ~

my beloved family,

my dear and esteemed *Selah* colleagues,

and all of the gracious *Selah* interns,  
especially Deb, Christie, Andrea, Bob, Laurel, Tracee, Daryl,  
Jim, Emily, Martha, Roberta, Judy, Carrie, Jim, and Gretchen,  
whose work helped shape this thesis project ~

in Christ's Joy, as, indeed,  
“we find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—  
out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory,  
standing tall and shouting our praise.”  
— Romans 5:2, The Message

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## **ABSTRACT**

Spiritual direction—the historic practice of one person attending another in his or her life of faith—is experiencing a resurgence of popularity in the contemporary North American Church. With it comes the need for further training programs that have theological and methodological integrity. In response to this need, through the ministry organization Leadership Transformations I developed *Selah*, a certificate program in spiritual direction. *Selah* is intentionally Trinitarian and biblical in its spiritual theology, and contemplative in its methodology: Given who God is and how he works, what might we expect to see happening—both in the directee’s life and in a spiritual direction session that involves attentively noticing and trustingly responding to God’s Spirit—as God’s Spirit shapes us into the image of Christ?

Referencing the biblical Scriptures as well as many of the spiritual classics, both historical and contemporary, this thesis explores *Selah’s* four rhythms of the spiritual life: Releasing, Resting, Renewing, and Rejoicing. It applies this spiritual theology to the content of contemplative spiritual direction—what tends to be going on in a directee’s life and prayer when he or she is in each rhythm, and how does the ministry of spiritual direction help them to recognize, understand, and respond to God in the midst of their experience?

The thesis is supported by written evidence from *Selah’s* first cohort of interns.

**CHAPTER 1:**

***SELAH INVITATION:***

**FORMING A SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TRAINING PROGRAM**

**THAT IS TRINITARIAN, CONTEMPLATIVE, AND BIBLICAL**

**Spiritual Direction: Its Practice and History**

Spiritual companionship, traditionally called *spiritual direction*, is an intentional relationship between two people whose attentive focus is the one person's (the "directee's") life with God. Its premise is that God is always at work in us, continually directing our lives through his Holy Spirit so that we are being shaped into the image of Christ, and by noticing that presence of God at work in us, we can more fully respond to, cooperate with, and grow in graced communion with the Triune God.<sup>1</sup> "*God decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son*" (Romans 8:29, *The Message*). "*God is always doing something: an active grace is shaping this life into a mature salvation.*"<sup>2</sup> In its core definition as one person intentionally and attentively listening with another to the presence of God, spiritual direction has been a regular practice of the people of God.<sup>3</sup> Often the prophets took this

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, when a pronoun must be used for "God," I have chosen the masculine pronoun to reflect both the personal nature of God (rather than the impersonal and awkward repetition of the noun God...God...God...) as well as general biblical language (biblically, "she" is never used of God the Father, of Jesus, or of the Holy Spirit; "he" is, even of the Holy Spirit). This is not intended to suggest that God is male; indeed, "God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27, TNIV). There are many biblical references to ways in which God is like a mother/woman, just as God is like a father, warrior, king; see for instance Psalm 131, Isaiah 49:15, Isaiah 66:13, Luke 13:34.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 103-4.

<sup>3</sup> While I'll be addressing Christian spiritual direction in this work, spiritual companionship in a broad sense (one person attending another in their life of faith) can be found in other faith traditions as well; classical philosophical sages such as Socrates, Hindu gurus, African shamans, Buddhist mendicant ascetics,

role in the Old Testament world (see Nathan's relationship with David in 2 Samuel 7, 12, 1 Kings 1), as did occasionally the priests, such as Eli's direction of the young Samuel, helping him notice that the voice he heard in the night is God's, and directing him in how to listen and respond (1 Samuel 3).

In the New Testament, Jesus himself modeled the loving presence and heart-searching question-asking technique of spiritual direction; see his “direction” of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24 (“When was your heart burning within you?” has become a standard spiritual direction question!). In a broad sense even the disciples practiced spiritual direction, such as the occasion recorded in Acts 10-11 when Peter discerningly took what he was noticing in his own roof-top prayer and used it to listen attentively to Cornelius’ experience with God, helping Cornelius to understand God’s invitations.

Spiritual direction as a practice of the Christian Church has been around in one form or another since the days of the early Church.<sup>4</sup> The desert fathers and mothers of the fourth and fifth centuries “helped to shape the inner life” of their disciples through “prayer, concern and pastoral care”<sup>5</sup>; within the Russian Church over the centuries this role developed into that of the “starets,” or “holy man,” someone whose long life of holiness and ascetic practice equipped him to guide others in the life of holiness. The individual spiritual companion role was enculturated in the early Celtic Church through the “anmchara” (“soul friend”), and was gradually adapted to the growing monastic life

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Sufi guides, and Jewish rabbis all have offered this kind of spiritual companionship (See Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977], 39-41).

<sup>4</sup> For a more thorough examination of the history of spiritual direction in the life of the Church, see Leech, *Soul Friend*, chapter 2; also Gary Moon and David Benner, eds. *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Leech, *Soul Friend*, 41-42.

of the Celtic Church, even while it maintained a relative mutuality between the director and directee.

Elsewhere in the western Church, Abbots and Abbesses of medieval monasteries took on a spiritual father/mother role with those under their care, and by the late Middle Ages gifted lay people were offering spiritual direction. Distinctive styles of spiritual companionship arose around particular monastic orders (most visible today being the Ignatian style practiced through the *Spiritual Exercises*) and even particular geographic identities (the English school, for instance, developed not out of monastic practice but out of the ministry of “solitaries,” lay individuals affiliated with particular parishes who devoted themselves to a life of prayer, and offered direction in a non-authoritarian, friendship model of encouragement in holistic living, grounded in the common worship of the English Church<sup>6</sup>).

Even once the Protestant Reformation arrived with its emphasis on the individuality of the believer, and his or her direct access to God without the need for any human intermediary, church leaders such as John Calvin and Martin Luther offered direction of a type through counsel and letters. Gradually, however, the practice of personal spiritual direction in the Protestant church fell into disuse, being replaced by an emphasis on conveyance of information through the corporate settings of preaching, teaching, and church life. In Protestant churches that continued to offer a person-to-person, it by and large took the form of discipleship—a more mature person shaping the life of someone less mature in the faith, through conveyance of knowledge and practice. (The Anglican Church is an exception to the Protestant move away from the ministry of

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology According to the English Pastoral Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 44-57.

spiritual direction; robust direction has continued to be offered by famed English directors such as George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, and Jeremy Taylor in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; John Keble in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Evelyn Underhill, Reginald Somerset Ward, and Gilbert Shaw in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)

### **The Problem and the Need: Spiritual Direction in the Contemporary Church**

Having fallen into disuse amongst the non-Anglican Protestant branches of Christendom over the last several centuries, the practice of spiritual direction has enjoyed a reawakening for Protestants in recent years. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, who historically more continuously have offered spiritual direction to their clergy, have themselves seen a recent surge of interest in individual spiritual direction, amongst both clergy and laity.<sup>7</sup> Consequently a web search today under the prompt “spiritual direction” produces over 1.7 million results, reflecting what might be called the current “popularizing” of spiritual direction.<sup>8</sup>

One of the earliest contemporary works to give attention to this classic practice is Kenneth Leech’s *Soul Friend*, published in 1977. Henri Nouwen, writing in the introduction to the book’s first US edition in 1980, elucidates a clear Trinitarian theology and contemplative methodology of spiritual direction:

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<sup>7</sup> William Barry, Jesuit leader of Ignatian directed retreats and individual spiritual direction, notes that between 1966 and 1975 the directed retreat movement, in which a retreatant meets regularly with an experienced spiritual director, “spread like a brushfire,” and that “Spiritual direction with an emphasis on the discussion of the actual religious experience of the person also took on great importance.” William Barry, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 159.

<sup>8</sup> “Spiritual direction training” numbers 494,000 results; “spiritual director training” 748,000 results; “spiritual direction programs” 257,000 results; “Christian spiritual direction training” 554,000 results; “evangelical spiritual direction training results” 161,000; numbers based on a search in June 2010.

Most simply expressed, spiritual direction is direction offered in the prayer life of the individual Christian. It is an art which includes helping to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in our life, assisting in the difficult task of obedience to these movements, and offering support in the crucial life decisions that our faithfulness requires. Prayer, thus understood, embraces all of life, and spiritual direction is therefore a very awesome ministerial task.... [The] intimacy between the spiritual director and the Christian... is not a mutual attachment to each other... but a shared attachment to God through Jesus Christ. It is in the space created by this common attachment to God that discernment can take place...<sup>9</sup>

Nouwen's words reflect the fairly orthodox theology that defined Christian spiritual direction training and literature in the 1970's and 1980's, but by the 1990's the movement's theology had begun to broaden, so much so that by 2008, Tilden Edwards, founder in 1978 of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, uses non-Christian language of noting "what comes to us in intuitive spiritual awareness, which is our open presence to reality in the larger gracious Presence," of the God we share with "Rumi, a medieval Sufi poet in the mystical heart of Islamic tradition, who greatly treasured Jesus," and of the "underlying direct openness to deep reality pervaded by Spirit's living presence" (not *the* Spirit's, as in the Holy Spirit of the Trinity).<sup>10</sup>

The training program founded by Edwards, the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation<sup>11</sup>--widely recognized as the parent program of most spiritual direction training programs today, both in its temporal priority as well as in its contemplative methodology--has followed its founder in broadening its theology. The application form for Shalem's current Spiritual Guidance Program states that ideal applicants are those who "Desire a serious experiential and academic program with an ecumenical mix of

<sup>9</sup> Henri Nouwen, in the Introduction to Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), ix.

<sup>10</sup> Tilden Edwards, "Our Mystical Heart," in *Conversations Journal* Volume 6:1 Spring/Summer 2008, Psychological Studies Institute, pp 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> The website for Shalem Institute is [www.shalem.org](http://www.shalem.org).

peers in a Christian context, open to other faith traditions,” and those who “Actively express commitment to and seeking of the Truth of God through a religious tradition and open to [sic] learning from other traditions.”<sup>12</sup>

Shalem is not alone in its theological swing away from Trinitarian language. A quick survey of many other leading training programs reveals the same movement. Oasis Ministries, located in central Pennsylvania, speaks of “grounding participants in the Christian contemplative tradition,” but uses the word “Christ/Christian/Christianity” on only one page out of its 23-page long brochure, and makes reference in the same brochure to “Eastern Buddhist Spirituality,” to “the presence of Spirit in our lives,” and to a retreat program for returning spiritual directors which includes a theme entitled “Rumi: The Sufi Mystic.”<sup>13</sup> Chestnut Hill College, a Roman Catholic school near Philadelphia, PA, offers a Spiritual Direction Practicum whose 19-page application document makes multiple references to “God,” “faith,” “prayer,” and “calling,” but no use of any word relating to “Christ/Christian/Christianity;” amongst other criteria for application, mention is made of attention to “your relationship to the earth” and demonstrated love for the body through “massage, dance, yoga, etc.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Shalem Institute, Application Form, [http://www.shalem.org/files/forms/sgp\\_application.pdf](http://www.shalem.org/files/forms/sgp_application.pdf) (accessed June 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development, Camp Hill PA, 2008-2009 Program Guide, Vol 20, Issue 1. For further information, see [www.oasismin.org](http://www.oasismin.org).

<sup>14</sup> Chestnut Hill College, <http://www.chc.edu> (accessed December 2008). It should be noted that some programs, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have managed not to shift as far from orthodox theology as those cited above; see, for instance, Kairos School of Spiritual Formation, formed in the late 1980’s in east-central PA (<http://www.on-the-journey.org>); and Pecos Benedictine School for Spiritual Direction, which describes its mission with the phrase “The School seeks to respond to the expanding number of North American Christians from all traditions, who are on a search to discover and recover the fullness of the spiritual heritage embodied in the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions” (<http://www.pecosmonastery.org/School.htm>); Christian Formation and Direction Ministries on the west coast has always had, and continues to maintain, an evangelical identity (<http://www.cfdm.org/index.htm>).

And so it should come as no surprise to see the culture of spiritual direction itself turning from specifically Christian language and presuppositions. Spiritual Directors International, the international umbrella organization for spiritual directors, was founded in 1989 as a gathering of Christian spiritual directors in the Roman Catholic tradition but now self-identifies as multi-religious in its mission statement: “Throughout human history, individuals have been called to accompany others seeking the Mystery we name God. In this time, Spiritual Directors International responds to this call by tending the holy around the world and across traditions.”<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the practice of spiritual direction has long existed in other faith traditions, and continues to do so; what is happening today is that Christian spiritual direction, as offered by individual directors and training programs in both Protestant and Roman Catholic settings, is losing its Christian identity in order to share its language and practice with those in Jewish, Islamic, New Age, and even non-religious traditions.

Interestingly, at the same time as the training and culture of traditionally Christian spiritual direction is moving away from that which is Christian, the evangelical church is discovering the language and paradigms of spiritual formation, including the practice of spiritual direction. But when newly interested evangelicals attempt to find a spiritual director who is an evangelical, frustration compounds: the few evangelicals who offer spiritual direction have themselves most likely been trained in programs that are either theologically broad or methodologically diminished (neither biblical, Trinitarian, nor contemplative).

It should be noted that several evangelical seminaries do now offer some type of education in spiritual direction, be they Master’s programs with a concentration in

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<sup>15</sup> Spiritual Directors International, <http://www.sdiworld.org/home.html> (accessed December 2008).

Spiritual Direction, or more focused Certificate programs in Spiritual Direction. Denver Seminary offers a M.Div. degree with a Christian Formation and Soul Care Concentration (standard M.Div. requirements with additional courses specific to Christian Formation and Soul Care, including two Soul Care Practicums) as well as a more topic-intensive MA in Christian Formation and Soul Care (more of the classes are specific to Soul Care; also including the Soul Care Practicums), and a Certificate of Completion in Christian Formation & Soul Care (4 courses plus the Soul Care Practicums). George Fox University offers a M.A. in Spiritual Formation with a Concentration in Spiritual Direction which includes two courses and one practicum in Spiritual Direction, as well as a Certificate program in Spiritual Formation and Discipleship which involves course work plus supervised practice of spiritual direction. North Park Seminary offers a Certificate in Spiritual Direction which includes three week-long intensives over a three-year period as well as supervised practice of spiritual direction. Talbot Seminary offers a M.A. in Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, perhaps the most intensive of the seminary degree programs mentioned here; it includes academic work as well as rigorous training in the practice of spiritual direction.<sup>16</sup>

The theological framework of such programs appears trustworthy and thorough. The extent to which they focus on spiritual direction as a practice varies widely, and amongst those that do give specific and in-depth attention to spiritual direction, their contemplative methodology varies. While a few institutions appear to be characterized

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<sup>16</sup> For further information, see the seminaries' websites: Denver Seminary, Certificate of Completion in Christian Formation and Soul Care (<http://www.denverseminary.edu/become-a-student/denver-seminary-degree-programs/>); George Fox University, Certificate in Spiritual Formation and Discipleship (<http://www.georgefox.edu/catalog/graduate/sem/programs/index.html>); North Park Theological Seminary Center for Spiritual Direction, Certificate Program, (<http://www.northpark.edu/sem/academics/special/csd.html>); Talbot School of Theology, The Institute for Spiritual Formation (ISF), (<http://www.talbot.edu/degrees/ma-spiritual-formation-and-soul-care/>).

by comprehensive and high quality training (particularly those mentioned above), often, by the very nature of the program's affiliation with an academic institution, the academics of the course tend to dictate and overwhelm its methodology, so that the program is primarily lecture-based in a classroom setting, producing graduates who may be able to correctly teach the Church Fathers' approach to sanctification, or to analyze a directee's psycho-spiritual history, but not be able to help the directee notice and respond to the indwelling guiding presence of the Holy Spirit. In general, only those programs whose primary intent is to train spiritual directors offer the kind of practice-based training that's necessary, and simply by the program's affiliation with a seminary, those called to pursue this training find themselves facing considerable additional coursework and considerable additional cost beyond the focused training in the distilled essence of spiritual direction that they desire.

Granted, the advantage of a training program's affiliation with a seminary lies in its provision of a wider context of theological education. One of the trademarks of evangelicalism is our theological caution, leading to the protective security of clear, objective doctrine. The risk in encouraging someone to do something as potentially subjective as simply "listen to the Spirit of God" makes us uneasy. Hence, we shy away from contemplative listening, preferring the safe if predictable "direction" that comes from predetermined guidelines of programmatic instruction—a model whose roots lie in theological creeds and evangelical discipleship programs. However, while such creeds are indeed necessary for defining orthodoxy (right belief), and such programs useful for training in orthopraxy (right behavior), neither directly fosters orthopathy (right heart), the true providence of spiritual formation as attended to in spiritual direction. Only the

Holy Spirit can transform heart and soul, and for spiritual direction to be about the Holy Spirit directing such transformation, it must be contemplative in style—an alert, responsive engagement with the Holy Spirit of God. This kind of contemplative listening is best fostered outside of a classroom setting.

The need in today's Church culture is undeniable: Spiritual direction training must be developed and offered that is Trinitarian in its understanding of the God who is at work in us, shaping us into the image of Christ through the Holy Spirit, contemplative in its methodology, creating space in which people can be attentive towards and responsive to the true "director" of this sanctification, the Holy Spirit of the Triune God, and biblical in its understanding and interpretation of who this God is, who we are, and what goes on in this salvation life in Christ in which we are being shaped for eternity.

### ***Selah: Formation of a Training Program in Response to the Need***

In my own life, after master's level theological training in Christian Education and years of ministry in the local church, I found my own ministry increasingly being about crafting experiences where people could listen to God, in retreat settings, one-on-one conversations, Bible study groups, and corporate worship. When I first experienced spiritual direction as a practice I felt as if I'd come home; here was a language and a way of being that helped give expression to what had been happening in my ministry, and to what it is to be in communion with the living God. At the encouragement of my first spiritual director I spent several years looking for a training program that had theological and experiential integrity and that would best suit the parameters of my life and ministry; eventually that same spiritual director formed a training program herself in the Pacific

Northwest, and I gratefully enrolled in it. During the following two years of my training, I found my call to spiritual direction being confirmed; at the same time, I began to notice a newly stirring call to train others in this holy practice. As we're trained to do, I "held this lightly," praying it and listening to God to see what it might be about.

In the spring of 2006 the ministry with which I'd recently affiliated, Leadership Transformations Inc,<sup>17</sup> began to explore the possibility of offering a program that meets the need for Trinitarian, contemplative, biblical spiritual direction training. The exploration itself had the feel of riding the crest of a forming wave in the sea of American evangelicalism, a wave prepared for with the establishment of evangelical training centers and ministries in the mid-1900's, and continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a quiet shift in emphasis towards spiritual formation as an ancient/modern paradigm for Christian life growth. Over the next year we gave prayerful thought to our model of training, and to our program philosophy and identity. We were encouraged in the process by the prayers and advice of the leaders of the program in the Pacific Northwest who themselves had trained me; their residential model, general curricular topics, and contemplative methodology inspired much of our early thinking.<sup>18</sup>

The process of shaping our training program was characterized by several experiences of "giveness," times on our journey when the next sweep of landscape unfolded before us in all its detail. The first of these came with our name. After a few weeks of brainstorming, we had a list of possible program names; *Selah*, in the middle of

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<sup>17</sup> Their website is [www.leadershiptransformations.org](http://www.leadershiptransformations.org). LTI is a spiritual formation ministry with offices in New England and Colorado.

<sup>18</sup> We are indebted to CFDM Northwest under the leadership of Julie Anderton and Lisa Myers, who modeled for us excellence in training and encouraged us through their generosity of heart, time, and prayer (<http://www.cfdm.org/northwest.htm>).

the list, seemed to draw us. *Selah* is a biblical word (Hebrew סָלָה) found primarily in the psalms. It was only as we held it lightly in prayer, exploring it with the attentiveness of spiritual direction, that we realized all it contains: connotations of a reflective pause, a listening attentiveness in the word-crafted space of our salvation life.

Even as our name took on meaning, it began to give meaning to the crafting of *Selah*'s methodology. We chose a residential model, making use of retreat settings in which individuals step back from the busyness of life and ministry, with time for attentive reflection in silence and the accompanying reflective listening of faculty-facilitated peer group direction sharing (mirroring the purpose of spiritual direction itself as a set-apart time, in a set-apart space, filled with shared reflective listening). *Selah* interns would learn by doing, committing from the beginning to meeting with directees and to reflecting on that in supervision times with faculty, with both the direction and the supervision times characterized less by technique (i.e., what to say next) and more by learning to listen to the Holy Spirit in the present moment.

Similarly *Selah*'s curriculum unfolded in a thematic metaphor that we've come to call "*Selah* space." It's a metaphor that's shaped by the biblical description of salvation life as spacious life, filled with grace, freedom, and light, with Christ at the center. Psalm 23 captures this life, with green pastures and quiet waters, valleys of shadow that are yet places of safety, opening into oil-anointed feast-spread celebrations of life with the Good Shepherd. Jesus uses this image in his discourse on the Good Shepherd, who has come to lead his sheep through the gate to good pasture, "that they may have life, and have it to the full"(John 10:11).<sup>19</sup> Biblical and theological reflection on what goes on in this wide

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<sup>19</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Scriptures will be from *Today's New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, 2005).

open space where God shapes us into a mature salvation led us to a curricular outline based on the rhythms of the spiritual formation life, itself reflective of classical spiritual formation literature and spiritual theology.

Thus *Selah*'s curriculum uses both teaching and praxis components. Through lectures and reading, we help the interns develop a spiritual theology of spiritual direction's *foundational content of spiritual formation* (given who God is and how he works, what might we expect to see happening as his Spirit shapes us into the image of Christ?). Through praxis components (individual and group spiritual direction and supervision) we introduce the interns to the methodology of *spiritual direction as the central context* in which we give attention to what we're noticing of God and his work, and to our graced response.

### ***Selah Theology: The Attentive, Responsive Life of Communion with God***

#### *Salvation Life: The Wide Open Space of our Life in God*

Given the centrality of the *Selah* space metaphor to our program, more must be said about its origins, development, and historical and biblical grounding.

Early in my own practice of spiritual direction, I began to notice a series of "wide open space" images that have continued to come up in my ministry of spiritual direction and retreat leadership, as well as in my own prayer life, all arising in moments of attentiveness. The images accompany feelings of freedom, and grace, and being deeply loved by God.

Interestingly, they seem to arise for people in a variety of situations. For those struggling with a particular sin, whose felt experience is dark and closed in, confession

brings a feeling of freedom and space. For people who are afraid, desperately needing to feel safe because of life circumstances, a dawning awareness of God's presence leads to an image and feel of light and comfort, even if in their case they still huddle in God's embrace at the edge of the open space rather than leaping about in the middle of it. For those who find themselves invited into new ways of trusting God, the space is often filled with the other people in their life, not in restrictive but in celebratory ways.

Always, when examined closely, Jesus is there in the center of this space, doing one of the countless things he does in our lives as he works out our sanctification.

It is an image that Eugene Peterson captures in *The Message*, his careful, contextual phrasing into English, from the original Hebrew and Greek, the earthy language of the Scriptures:

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise (Romans 5:1-2, *The Message*).

Indeed, a careful reading of the Scriptures in any translation discovers this description of the salvation life, the place where we live in the hope of the glory of God. Consistently it has the feel and experience of freedom and spaciousness, light and life (See, for example, Psalm 18:19, "He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me"). It is Christ's space, and thus reveals Christ's presence—light and life, truth, freedom, mercy, and grace.

Further, this is even how the Scriptures portray the struggles of our salvation life. Note that the above verses in Romans are immediately followed by verses on suffering,

and still the key image is one of hope: “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”(Romans 5:3-5).

There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit! (Romans 5:3-5, *The Message*).

According to the testimony of the Scriptures, and to the testimony of the Holy Spirit in us, this “wide-open space” is the place in which we live as the saved people of God.

We don’t live here haphazardly, however. We are called to live attentively, noticing God and his work, and responsively, joining with him in this place of spiritual formation as he shapes us into mature saints and priests in his kingdom, to his praise and glory.

This forming work of the Spirit of God is an ongoing process, what theologians call “sanctification.” And so the apostle Paul addresses the church in Galatia, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Galatians 4:19). While we are in an instant born into the kingdom of God when we put our faith in Christ Jesus, and we are at that time clothed anew with Christ in terms of being justified before God’s throne (Romans 3:24, Galatians 3:27), we still struggle with sin. It takes our lifetime this side of Eternity to go through the process of “being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.... Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:16).

Just as God is the one who formed us to begin with, “fearfully and wonderfully” as the psalmist notes (Psalm 139:13-16), so too it is God who transforms us from our sin-warped creaturely selves into a reflection of his glorious self. “Spiritual formation is primarily what the Spirit does, forming the resurrection life of Christ in us,” Peterson writes, adding, “There is not a whole lot we can do here any more than we can create the cosmos (that was the work of the Spirit in creation), any more than we can outfit Jesus for salvation (that was the work of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism). But there is a great deal that the Spirit can do.... What we can do, need to do, is be there.”<sup>20</sup>

We can “be there,” be *here*, attentively, in this wide open space, noticing how the Spirit brings about his shaping work, and giving glory to God.

#### *Spiritual Rhythms: The “How” of the Wide Open Space of our Life in God*

God’s creative work, as the first chapter of Genesis reveals it to us, is done in particular rhythms: the rhythm of time—evening and morning, a day, followed by another, and another, until the fullness of the seventh day; and the rhythm of action and observation—speaking into being, looking over what has just become, and delighting in it, again and again until the full resting delight of the seventh day.

So, too, God’s transforming work, the work of spiritual formation, takes place in particular rhythms. Interestingly they loosely parallel the natural rhythms of the seasons, as if a creational rhythm itself is at work in recreation. Broadly these rhythms involve God’s calling us into the *release* of dying (Autumn), into *resting* (Winter), into *renewal* (Spring), and into a fruitful, *rejoicing* fullness (Summer).

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 237.

Every church, every school of theology, every practitioner of lived spirituality comes up with their own schema to categorize the rhythms of the spiritual life. In contemporary evangelical teaching, for example, we hear much about the movement from repentance to faith, what we like to think of as the “pared down to the basics” rhythm of the biblical message.

Biblically speaking, this schema is on solid ground. Indeed, Peterson speaks of Jesus’ first imperatives in Mark’s Gospel, “repent,” “believe,” and “follow,” as being Jesus’ basic invitation to life in his kingdom, the “vast theater of salvation.”<sup>21</sup> However, the problem with this particular schema is that we tend to interpret it as a single, linear timeline of our life of faith: we were living in sin; we repented, believing in Jesus; now we live in faith. It is a done deal. (Let me note that this is not Peterson’s interpretation; his entire work is a fleshing out of the complexities involved in the “following Jesus” life.)

The contemporary American evangelical church in particular pays little attention to any kind of ongoing rhythm of the spiritual life. Confession (an ongoing discipline of repentance) is seldom found in our corporate worship; Sabbath (a discipline of believing) is becoming trendy to talk about but not yet evidenced in our corporate life, much less in our individual lives that are still so modeled on the productivity paradigm; attentiveness (the way of being in our following) is not given room for experience or interpretation.

As we study the history of spiritual formation, though, we realize that within the repenting, believing, and following there exists a multi-layered rhythm that is ongoing,

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<sup>21</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways That Jesus is The Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 21-22.

constantly weaving its way through the daily and weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms of our natural life.

Indeed, the Church that follows a sense of Church Year brilliantly (some would say inspirationally) has worked attention to the supernatural rhythms of our salvation life, based on the history of salvation, into the natural rhythms of the seasons (which works nicely in the northern hemisphere, at least; it perhaps does a separate work of unsettling for those believers in the southern hemisphere!). Hence we groan with the creation in the waiting rhythm of Advent, longing for light; we live rhythms of celebration and hope in Christmas and Epiphany; we acknowledge the stuckness of our sin during the long Lenten stuckness of late winter, practicing the disciplines of purgation; we celebrate new birth with the Resurrection; and we enjoy rhythms of rest as well as fruitfulness in the long fruitful growing season of post-Pentecost Ordinary Time, before preparing to live it all again.

The very repetition of the Church Year's rhythms, as of the creation's natural rhythms, speaks theologically to the nature of these spiritual formation rhythms: they are not linear. The practices and rhythms of one movement do help to create the space conducive for, and hence lead logically into, another, but it is possible for a person to be experiencing elements of more than one movement at a time, or to move in one instance from one to another and in a separate instance to move to a different one. Foundationally, these rhythms are ongoing, an ever-deepening of the Spirit's work in us until Eternity. Then the fullness of God's glory, glimpsed as foretaste throughout the rhythms of our life in the wide open space, will be revealed.

Historically, the Church has been consistent in what it notes as predictable, even necessary, components to the rhythms of the spiritual life. The commonalities of the various schemas can allow us to categorize them widely into a twofold rhythm—detachment and attachment, or indifference and attentiveness, as the desert fathers and mothers noted, with their accompanying spiritual disciplines of abstinence and engagement (“abstinence” and “engagement” is how Dallas Willard categorizes the spiritual disciplines in his excellent work, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*). Belden Lane refers to these two wide foundational rhythms as “the deconstructive” and “the constructive... poles of the spiritual life.”<sup>22</sup>

Each of the two wider rhythms can themselves be broken down into two further rhythms—detachment/indifference includes specific movements of Releasing and of Resting, and attachment/attentiveness includes both Renewing and Rejoicing.<sup>23</sup> All of the lived components of the spiritual life may be found within this fourfold rhythm—Releasing, Resting, Renewing, and Rejoicing—each movement of which is supported by and explored within various spiritual disciplines (see Appendix B, Rhythms of the Spiritual Life).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 188.

<sup>23</sup> In honor of my two Doctoral mentors, who value such things, I have somewhat arbitrarily and alliteratively named and categorized these movements as follows: Releasing, Resting, Renewing, and Rejoicing. When using the words “Releasing,” “Resting,” “Renewing,” and “Rejoicing” to refer to *Selah*’s thematic rhythms of our spiritual formation life, I will capitalize them; when used as common adverbs and/or adjectives, they’ll remain lowercase.

<sup>24</sup> While it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit, that work is done in incarnational ways, ways that he invites us into with him in order to be transformed. Dallas Willard speaks of our having not only a vision and intention for such transformation, but our employing means for this (Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* [Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002], 84). Such means include intentional actions and practices that we call “spiritual disciplines.”

### *Spiritual Practices: Supporting and Nurturing God’s Work in Formation Rhythms*

As is the case with spiritual formation itself, the rhythms of our spiritual life are God-initiated. They reflect whatever work he is doing in us at any given time. When we are able to notice the rhythm of God’s work in us, we are able to choose practices that nurture that work, that “put us in a place where we can begin to notice God and respond to his word to us,” as Adele Calhoun describes the role of spiritual disciplines.<sup>25</sup>

In order to attempt to practice disciplines that are out of sync with whatever rhythm God is working in our life is like adding the wrong ingredient to something you’re cooking—in and of itself the ingredient may be delicious, exotic, even a basic necessity, but if added at the wrong time or in the wrong proportions, it can cause an otherwise rich dish to taste bland at best, and sickening at worst. Attention to Holy Spirit-invited practices will help us to more deeply explore and nurture whatever it is that God is doing in us, leading to a richer understanding of him and of ourselves, and to a deeper intimacy between us.

### *Spiritual Direction: Attentive “Noticing and Responding” in the Wide Open Space of Our Life in God*

One of the spiritual disciplines we practice in order to “begin to notice God,” to pay attention to what practices are Holy Spirit-invited in any given season, is the practice of spiritual direction. As an intentional relationship in which we explore what we are noticing about God’s shaping work in us, it is even more deeply a place where we

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<sup>25</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19.

explore the intimacy of our relationship with God, and nurture our loving response to him.<sup>26</sup>

In speaking of “noticing God,” “intimacy of our relationship with God,” and “our loving response,” what we are actually describing is prayer. Most people tend to think of prayer as one-directional communication, our verbal response to who God is, or to something God has done, or for a situation in which we desire God’s intervention.

A fuller definition of prayer, however, goes beyond it being merely our vocalizations God-wards—it’s also God’s communication towards us. Indeed the Triune God initiates all true prayer, and is active in all prayer, towards us and, through his Holy Spirit, in us. Prayer thus moves beyond communication to communion, and beyond something we do, to a way of being.

“Prayer is nothing more than an ongoing and growing love relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,”<sup>27</sup> writes Richard Foster, and Anthony Bloom states “Prayer is an encounter and a relationship, a relationship which is deep.”<sup>28</sup> “All true prayer is based on the conviction of the presence of the Spirit in us and of His unfailing and continual inspiration,”<sup>29</sup> Thomas Keating adds, nuancing the interplay between the Holy Spirit’s words and our own.

Thus defined, “prayer” is an expression of what is going on between us and God at any given time in our life in God. The form it takes will differ according to what God

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<sup>26</sup> In a sense spiritual direction is one discipline among many, but in another sense, it is a foundational discipline. Foundational disciplines are those practices that help us to interpret God as we encounter him in all the other possible disciplines, and include confession, meditating on Scripture, spiritual direction or companionship, and worship. Prayer is, of course, the constant presence in all of the disciplines.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (New York: HarperCollins Pub, 1992), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970), 26.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: Continuum International Pub Group, 2007), 11.

is doing in us at that particular time. Within the Selah rhythms, our prayer during seasons of Releasing will look different from our prayer during seasons of Renewing; we will be experiencing our relationship with God in different ways in seasons of Resting than we will be in seasons of Rejoicing, and our expression of that relationship—our prayer—will look different as well.

### *Theology of Discernment and of Prayer*

Noticing our prayer—what's going on between us and God at any given time—requires discernment, a graced attentiveness to the Holy Spirit that is new to most evangelicals; indeed, most would say that trying to notice God's presence and forming work *directly* is confusing at best, and often quite difficult. “So, how is God present in your life?” usually elicits theological answers: “He's sovereign.” This is absolutely true, but rarely particular enough to be helpful. “What is God doing in your life?” usually brings an exasperated “I haven't a clue” or a cautious “I don't know.” “What is God inviting you into?” is met with a blank stare. These questions can shut down a spiritual direction session, particularly with those new to a reflective, contemplative prayer life.

Evangelicals do well with “knowing” the will of God based on Scriptural teaching, but we flounder when it comes to figuring out what to do when two options seem equally “good” in moral character and “responsible” in duty. When all the pros and cons line up evenly, and sound theological and biblical reasoning brings us to the stalemate prayer of “God, please show me what to do!” or even, “God, please show me what to pray for in this!” how do we know God's direction?

We can learn to practice discernment, one of the classic emphases of spiritual direction. Discernment is about listening in on what the Triune God enables us to listen in on of his prayerful conversation for and in us. According to Hebrews 7:25, Jesus and the Father, seated side by side in the heavenly realms, are in conversation about us (“interceding”): “Therefore he [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

According to Romans 8:26-27, the Holy Spirit is at the same time praying (“interceding”) for us, in us: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” And according to John 16:13-14, what the Holy Spirit is praying in us is the same conversation that is going on between Jesus and the Father: “When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine.”

The Trinity is in conversation about us, and through the Holy Spirit, part of that conversation is going on in us. In the noticing that we practice in spiritual direction, we can listen in on, so to speak, and join in with, this prayer of the Trinity.

Often this prayer is too deep for words—the “wordless groans” of Romans 8:26. So we notice those deep gut groans, our deep heart feelings, longings, and desires. Hence in spiritual direction we ask questions such as “What are you drawn to?” when reading

Scripture, for instance, or “When was your heart burning within you?” (as in Luke 24:32); or “When or in what do you feel a stirring of joy, of life, a ‘yes!’?” And when a directee answers, we ask, “Might that be God’s Spirit in you? Might that be God’s desire for you, God’s prayer for you and in you...?”

Additionally, exploring those longings through awareness of the rhythms of spiritual formation can open up discernment. Notice the language here: “exploring” and “awareness.” This is not a discipleship model, where people are given disciplines to practice in order to create a pre-guaranteed result. This is growth in awareness of God, in what *God* is doing, in order to let him deepen that work.

Approaching spiritual direction with an acute awareness of space and rhythm does wonders for holy attentiveness. It begins with the director’s own attention to space: physical space—hospitable, uncluttered, silent, graced—and spiritual space—equally hospitable, open to the presence of Christ and letting his Spirit, as the host, set the tone. We still our own rhythms, beginning the time in silence, opening ourselves to an awareness of the feel of God’s presence. We can then help the directee to notice God with a simple question about space or rhythm: “What are you sensing of God in this silence—what’s the feel of this?”, or more generally, “What’s the feel of your life right now?” Identifying the spiritual formation rhythm that God is working in the person’s life helps us begin to discern what God is doing, and even to identify particular spiritual practices that may nurture that work.

Thus the following chapters will give attention to not only the rhythms of the spiritual life, but to the ways in which spiritual direction, as an expression of and

exploration of a directee's prayer, is affected by and strengthened by awareness of the spiritual formation rhythms.

## Conclusion

Most literature on and training in spiritual direction explores it as a methodology, a way of listening to the Holy Spirit with and on behalf of another. We learn how to recognize classic movements within a spiritual direction relationship, and within a directee's relationship to God—resistance, for example, or invitation.

But what about the relationship between the wider study of spiritual formation and the specific practice of spiritual direction? If God is working in us through the rhythms of spiritual formation, are there ways in which we can bring our understanding of these rhythms into a spiritual direction relationship, without compromising our basic contemplative stance of letting the Holy Spirit be the spiritual director?

*Selah* attempts to do this, structuring its residencies around the teaching themes of the four spiritual formation rhythms (Releasing, Resting, Renewing, and Rejoicing), and within this thematic and theological framework, examining how the practice of spiritual direction encounters, interprets, and nurtures God's forming work in the lives of his people.<sup>30</sup>

Each of the next four chapters—exploring the four *Selah* rhythms in turn—will elaborate on the *spiritual theology* presented in this introductory chapter, referencing the

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<sup>30</sup> Residency 1 introduces the four-fold spiritual formation rhythm as well as the contemplative stance of spiritual direction. The following Residencies 2 through 5 explore the rhythms of Releasing, Resting, Renewing, and Rejoicing respectively and their impact on what's noticed in spiritual direction, concluding with a summary of the program's thematic framework and praxis.

Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as well as many of the spiritual classics, both historical and contemporary.

Each chapter will apply the rhythm's spiritual theology to the *content of spiritual direction*—what tends to be going on in a directee's life and prayer when they're in each rhythm, and how the ministry of spiritual direction may help them recognize, understand, and respond to God in the midst of their experience.

As appropriate, each chapter will present written evidence of the *growing theology and praxis of Selah's first cohort of interns* within that particular spiritual formation rhythm, supporting my thesis about how the contemplative practice of spiritual direction helps us notice the Triune God, at work in us in biblical ways, for the sake of our maturing salvation life in him.<sup>31</sup>

The evidence presented in chapters 2 through 5 will be primarily qualitative, but will be followed by a concluding chapter in which quantitative measurements from an evaluative tool will be examined, with recommendations for the *Selah* program's further development.

Welcome into *Selah*: the space of our salvation life with God, and the program that trains us to be attentive companions to this shared life.

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<sup>31</sup> Written evidence will be drawn from the interns' monthly Examen and Verbatim forms, along with comments from their Reflection papers and occasional additional assignments.

## CHAPTER 2:

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DIRECTION IN THE RELEASING RHYTHM

“Life seems pretty hard right now,” a directee may begin a spiritual direction session. “Everything feels like a struggle, and I don’t know where God is in the midst of it.” To a spiritual director trained in Selah, this opening line may signal that it’s a time of Releasing in the directee’s life.

Releasing is the first of the fourfold rhythms in our exploration of the spiritual life, although as noted in Chapter 1, the rhythms are not linear; we move freely between them and cycle back through them through the course of our life.

Experiences of the Releasing movement include and are variously described as repentance, purgation, cleansing, paring, pruning, detachment, sacrifice, secrecy, surrender, and dying. Corresponding intentional practices (what are commonly called “spiritual disciplines”<sup>1</sup>) include confession, reconciliation, simplicity, frugality, chastity, fasting, and submission, among others.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C, “Spiritual Disciplines,” for a detailed, but by no means comprehensive, list of spiritual disciplines. I am defining spiritual disciplines as any wholesome activities that we practice regularly with the intention of being more attentive and responsive to God. Hence many “non-spiritual” activities could count as spiritual disciplines if we engage in them in ways that help us notice God. Thus “trusting rest” makes it on the list, i.e. releasing into God’s care any activities or concerns while we take a nap, as does “attentive exercise,” if our minds and hearts are meditating on his word or listening for his voice while we engage in it.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C, the column for Releasing. Note that the nuances between experiences and disciplines are somewhat arbitrary. One may choose a practice in order to shape a desired experience—the practice of “fasting” shapes “detachment,” for instance. One may also find oneself engaging in a practice in response to an experience—such as when circumstances are producing a “surrender” of a role, and the person responds with a corresponding intentional “submission” of the heart. Thus some of the categories mentioned above as experiences may also be disciplines, and vice-versa, disciplines being those practices that are voluntarily and intentionally chosen, and engaged with in a regular way, in response to and to further nurture something that God is doing in us.

Jesus referred to the action of the movement of Releasing as “dying to self.” “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25).

Interestingly, in his parallel passage to Matthew’s, Luke records Jesus as saying “...must take up their cross *daily*” (Luke 9:23, italics mine). This rhythm is worked out in daily living, not just in the large sweep of a single-time conversion commitment. Indeed, in spiritual formation literature, whereas Protestants tend to emphasize the judicial nature of conversion, a single time from-death-to-life experience, Roman Catholics use the word “conversion” in much the way that Protestants speak of “sanctification,” as an ongoing, giving-over-to-Christ life. Simon Chan notes that “the doctrine of critical conversion and the concept of continuous conversion are not mutually exclusive, just as a doctrine of the forgiveness of sin should include a doctrine of the mortification of sins.”<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these two traditions offer us important understanding of our salvation life in Selah space. We are born anew into this salvation life through the atoning work of Christ, and we live here in ongoing familial ways through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Chan uses the analogy of a garden to describe the differences between the two views of conversion. “In Protestantism the heart is a wilderness that needs to be radically transformed before cultivation can begin. Conversion is a prerequisite for character formation;” in Catholicism, the heart is “a garden overgrown with weeds that need to be uprooted. Rooting out the weeds is part of the larger work of cultivating a more perfect garden.... Protestantism... rightly acknowledges that God the gardener has cleared the wilderness and has prepared the ground. But it has neither the comprehensive theory nor the technical know-how necessary to turn the barren plot into a garden. The Protestant is one who enjoys warm fellowship with the gardener but fails to work the garden afterward...” In a later paragraph Chan does modify this statement, noting the emergence of attention to spiritual disciplines in recent Protestantism. In an endnote Chan further acknowledges the existence of some Protestant asceticism historically but states that its development “has generally been ad hoc and piecemeal rather than systematic, except possibly among the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Puritans.” Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 61-62, endnote 255.

Jesus closes his call to take up one's cross with a reference to glory: "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward everyone according to what they have done" (Matthew 16:27). Spiritual formation always has as its end the glory of the Triune God. And one of the rhythms of the life that leads to glory is the rhythm of death. Jesus died, the apostle Paul says, and we who identify with him must join him in that dying: "...all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death," and "we have been united with him in a death like his" so that "we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:3,5). Suffering, dying, and glory are all expected parts of our inheritance: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8:17).

In the contemporary North American evangelical church's preaching and teaching we don't hear much about the rhythm of Releasing—be it suffering, or submission, or dying—although its experience is often what keeps our counseling ministries filled. To be fair, we don't hear it much in any church's preaching or teaching, except for those churches that live regularly with suffering. Yet in terms of spiritual formation, the rhythm of Releasing—dying to sin, to self, to anything that comes between us and God, even otherwise "good" things—is central to the "how" of God's shaping us into the image of Christ.

### **Spiritual Work in the Releasing Rhythm**

Clearly Releasing involves a releasing from sin. Repentance and confession, with any necessary actions of reparation and reconciliation, are all spiritual practices that

support the rhythm of Releasing. We may think of this as a releasing of the negatives in our life.

Sometimes, though, Releasing involves a letting go of the neutrals—those things that aren’t of themselves sin, but in particular ways or at particular times they clutter our space, getting in the way of our noticing God. Lenten awarenesses, practices of fasting and simplifying, help to accomplish this work of decluttering.

At other times, even good things are released: “[my Father]... cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,” Jesus says in his discourse on the Vine and the branches, “while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2).

All releasing is difficult, involving the pain of letting go. But as with all rhythms of spiritual formation, God uses the rhythm of Releasing to mature us in our relationship with him. “God uses the disappointments, disillusionments, and failures of your life to take your trust away from yourself and help you put your trust in Him,” writes Francois de Fenelon in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. “It is like being burned in a slow fire, but you would rather be burned up in a blaze of glory, wouldn’t you? How would this fast burn detach you from yourself? Thus God prepares events to detach you from yourself and from others.”<sup>4</sup>

Fenelon’s use of the word “detach” resonates with the writings of the desert fathers and mothers of the fourth and fifth centuries, who often spoke of “indifference” or “apatheia”—“without passion”—to describe what happens when one cultivates a “detachment” from the things that are not important. This is not the postmodern

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<sup>4</sup> Francois de Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart* (Jacksonville, FL: SeedSowers, Christian Books Publishing House, 1992), 25-26.

“whatever” detachment of not caring about life. Rather it is an intentional release of anything that feeds our egos, of anything other than God in which we find our deepest identity and value. In the words of John the Baptist, “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30).

Hence while the Releasing rhythm in general may feel like something that’s happening to us because of uncontrolled circumstances, and at times may be something that we intentionally enter into in order to do some good work of confession and decluttering, at its heart, as with all the formation rhythms, it’s an experience that God leads us into, for the sake of his deeper work in us. Speaking of “the dark night” (a time of felt distance from God, sometimes experienced in the Releasing rhythm), John of the Cross writes,

This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural and spiritual.... . Herein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in perfection of love, without its doing anything, or understanding.... Inasmuch as it is the loving wisdom of God, God produces striking effects in the soul, for, by purging and illuminating it, He prepares it for the union of love with God.<sup>5</sup>

In the rhythm of Releasing—from sin, from self, from things, from others—God creates in us a clean, open, trusting space. In this space, we cease from our tendencies to fight, to resist, to squirm, to be distracted; we grow in trust, like a weaned child in its mother’s arms—attentively resting (Resting characterizes the next Selah rhythm; see Chapter 3).

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<sup>5</sup> John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. (New York: Image Books/ Doubleday, 2005), Book II ch. 5, 107.

## **God's Invitation**

Given the different types of Releasing—releasing from sin (releasing as confession), releasing from neutrals (releasing as decluttering), and releasing from good things (releasing as pruning for fruitfulness)—it's important that a spiritual director not only be able to discern that a directee is in, or being invited into, the Releasing rhythm, but that he or she be able to discern the nuances of God's invitations in the midst of it.

"I feel like my life is way too busy," a directee may say, or "Every time I sit to pray my mind races." A few exploratory questions may help the director to discern this rhythm. "How does the busyness feel?" if answered "Invigorating, actually!" might be a sign that the true rhythm of the person's life right then is that of Rejoicing. If answered, though, with "Exhausting," or "Frustrating," this is a clue that God might be inviting the person into a time of Releasing. "What do you desire, down deep?" you ask, and the person, often with a glint of surprise in their eyes, responds, "To clear out my life" (They may also respond, "To get away from it all," or "To sleep for a week" – signs of God's invitation to the rhythm of Resting).

Once God's invitation to Releasing has been identified, a spiritual direction relationship may begin to explore what that releasing looks like, and to be willing to peel back the layers of what's most easily identifiable in order to see God's deeper work.

Notice the following description by a Selah intern of a month in which three directees were all coming with the same sense of nothing much happening in their spiritual life: "This past month the three directees began their spiritual direction in a

similar way. Each said that they had not really spent much time alone with God in prayer and Scripture reading. Life's busyness seemed to be the cause.”<sup>6</sup>

At this point in the narrative, the Selah intern director acknowledged feeling anxious. If a directee had nothing to report about their experience of God, what was there to work with in direction? Of all the rhythms, Releasing makes us the most uncomfortable. It’s usually unpleasant; it challenges our theology of “the blessed life;” it tends to go on longer than we wish it to; and it shakes up our image of God. A directee in the Releasing rhythm may cause anxiety in a director, both performance anxiety as well as a more godly concern for the directee’s wellbeing, although in the long run it may produce the most holy of direction experiences.

Thankfully, in the case above, the director recognized words descriptive of a possible Releasing rhythm. Having a sound theology of how the Releasing rhythm is about God’s presence and deepening work, she was encouraged to continue to explore the month with the directees. The narrative continues,

However, as we began to explore this in direction it became apparent that each directee had after all been mindful of God’s presence in their lives. Their encounter with God was not the “status quo” of quiet time, etc. so typical of their previous life with God. It was not about the “to do list” with God. Yet when I asked them to think about experiences in the past month that felt alive, each one was able to recall an experience like that, and once they recalled it they became aware of God in it, and how present he was. They were able to see that the experience was what they needed from him. Each seemed to be moving in a new place in their relationship with God.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> CC, Selah 2007-2009 Cohort, September 2008. From an unpublished collection of Selah interns’ work, 2007-2009 cohort, selected and edited by Susan P. Currie for this thesis. In quoting as well as merely summarizing examples from Selah interns, I’ve changed any identifying details to preserve the anonymity of their directees. For the same reason I have changed the initials of the interns whose written course work provides the sources of these quotes or examples. All come from Selah’s 2007-2009 cohort of 15 interns, the group used for this thesis project. The 15 interns, referenced by disguised initials, are: CC, DC, AD, BD, LD, DE, TE, JF, EK, ML, RN, JQ, CT, JT, GU.

<sup>7</sup> CC, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, September 2008.

This example describes a rather mild stage of Releasing, one that most spiritual directors can fairly easily diagnose and encourage a directee through. If God is inviting us into deeper ways of knowing him, it stands to reason that our previous ways of experiencing him may seem dry. If a director is able to diagnose this stage early on, and help a directee notice God in new and fresh ways, the directee may not at that particular time go any deeper into the Releasing rhythm, but may transition into a Renewing rhythm.

### **Spiritual Practice: Confession**

As described above, the Releasing rhythm doesn't sound all that unpleasant. Often, though, a directee experiences a Releasing stage in ways that are profoundly unsettling.

When a spiritual director hears stronger words that are frequently used to describe the rhythm of Releasing—detached, empty, bored, dark, distant—they might begin by discerningly exploring whether or not part of what's at hand is sin, and thus the directee's felt experience is actually God's invitation to confession. Sin does separate us from a relationship of wholeness and closeness with God, and thus does lead to feelings of distance, unease, darkness.

At the same time, we don't want to assume that if a directee is feeling distant from God it must be because they've sinned somehow. One need only read the biblical narratives of desert life to realize that while indeed, on occasion, one's sin propels one into the desert (as when Adam and Eve must leave the Garden), usually it's God who leads his people into the wilderness for the sake of his good and maturing work in them (See the Genesis 12 account of Abraham, whom God called out of the relatively civilized

Harran to live in the wilderness of Canaan; the Exodus account of God leading the Israelites out of highly civilized Egypt to live in the wilderness for forty years to “humble” and “test” and “teach” them “so that in the end it might go well with” them—Deuteronomy 8; the account in 1 Samuel 22-26 of David’s years in the wilderness, being shaped as God’s leader; and the account of Jesus himself, “led by the Spirit into the wilderness” [Luke 4:1]).

Nevertheless, given that sin does create distance between a person and God, it’s helpful to explore the Releasing rhythm for invitations to confession, encouraging practices that identify what directees need to confess as well as aiding them in doing so. The first of the two *examen* question categories is helpful to this practice: “When today (or this month, or this season) did you ignore God’s presence, or ignore his invitations, or act against his will and desire?” The answers to these questions become the raw material of confession.<sup>8</sup>

Confession should always take place in the context of God’s loving embrace, both invited by his love and received into his love: in his love for us, our loving God invites us into the act of confession, in order that we are restored to loving communion with him. Just as the rhythm of Releasing is not about being separated from God because of sin, but rather about being separated from sin because of growth in God, so too the practice of confession: “The idea behind frequent confession and absolution is not laxity but gradual progress towards perfection. Its immediate aim is to get the sinner back, not into the *state* but into the *stream* of grace; back into the daily work of the Church.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix D, “Examen.”

<sup>9</sup> Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology According to the English Pastoral Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 151. Thornton particularly notes the distinction between how the Roman Church practiced confession, regarding it “as the reconciliation of

Psalm 51 represents this type of prayer. The psalmist, convicted by his sin, confesses and asks for God's forgiveness:

Have mercy on me, O God  
according to your unfailing love;....  
Against you, you only, have I sinned....  
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;...  
Let me hear joy and gladness;...  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation...(vss 1,4,7-8,12).

Note the context of God's love, and the movement from sin to restoration. When a spiritual direction session involves confession of sin, using a classic prayer liturgy of confession such as that found in the Book of Common Prayer ensures that the prayer includes not only confession, but assurance of forgiveness, all in the context of God's love.<sup>10</sup>

### **Detachment from the False Self**

Quite often, though, what's going on in a season of Releasing is not about releasing sin as much as it is about releasing some of what has filled our life to distraction. One Selah intern described a directee who found himself in a season of Releasing due to the unexpected and severe illness of his wife. "Through this experience and sudden change he is noticing how God is releasing him from a life of continual and

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serious sinners," implying "the legal reinstatement of the excommunicate or of a grave sinner who has 'fallen out of grace,'" and how the Celtic Church came to influence the practice as "remedial, applying to all Christians and all types of sin...," implying "healing and therefore growth, which gives it an ascetical rather than a merely moral implication.... A penitent who is healed and strengthened may be better than he was before treatment." Modern Anglican confession, growing out of its Celtic roots, is "no juridical haggle, no means of easy acquittal, but a generous act of worship."

<sup>10</sup> "The Reconciliation of a Penitent," *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 447-452. Note that the liturgy offers both a formal sacramental absolution (offered by an ordained priest speaking with a priestly authority) as well as a simple (but just as effective) declaration of forgiveness, which may be uttered by a lay person; both forms use a Trinitarian statement to declare the penitent's forgiveness by the grace of the Holy Spirit through the offering of Jesus Christ to the Father.

perpetual motion and constant planning. He finds himself in a place of living one day at a time, a new place for him. He is looking at this radical shift in his life and slowly embracing its reality with profound grace....”<sup>11</sup>

The rhythm of Releasing usually includes an invitation to detachment, and to exploring, in spiritual direction, how it may be God whose hand is in such an invitation. In modern psychological language, the word “detachment” may be cause for alarm, suggesting as it does an unhealthy distancing from emotion. In spiritual formation language, however, “detachment” is really “holy detachment”—a movement of God’s Holy Spirit releasing us from ego-driven attachment to status or achievement or possessions “in order to free oneself for committed relationship to God.”<sup>12</sup> Belden Lane writes,

It means not taking the ego too seriously being able to watch one’s compulsive needs wilt under the discipline of inattention.... It does not suggest a blasé attitude of uncaring disinterest so much as the rigorous ordering of one’s desires, a reducing of everything to the demanding measure of God’s will. In discerning the will of God on any given matter, Ignatius insisted that one must “become like balance scales that are evenly weighted on both sides,” not pushing down one way or the other, simply resting there, waiting indifferently. Only in such a detached way can the ego be still enough to hear the voice of God.<sup>13</sup>

In holy detachment and its resulting relative stillness—a time when our frenetic and productive pace is slowed enough to reveal things for what they truly are—our “false self” is uncovered. A false self is the self we’ve adopted over the years as a way of presenting ourselves to the world, of crafting our identity based on power, status,

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<sup>11</sup> RN, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, October 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret R. Miles, “Detachment” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 111.

<sup>13</sup> Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 188; the phrase in quotation marks is Lane quoting Daniel O’Hanlon, S.J., in Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1980), 150.

achievement, and possessions. It's visible in the behaviors we've learned in order to preserve that identity. In the desert-like atmosphere of the Releasing rhythm, the false self is exposed and begins to die, leaving room for God's loving shaping of the true self:

Solitude [desert] is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter—the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.... Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature. As we come to realize that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us, that he is our true self, we can slowly let our compulsions melt away and begin to experience the freedom of the children of God.<sup>14</sup>

One Selah intern noticed a directee in this rhythm and wrote “God is revealing to him how he is concerned with how others see him, the image he creates and how that is a burden. God is working in him to release him from the burden of impression management and into a deeper attachment to Him and His vision for him.”<sup>15</sup>

As was the case with confession, this stage of Releasing is, fundamentally, about God’s love for us. Another Selah intern, in looking over her month with a few different directees, wrote of one “I sense the Spirit’s work most strongly in the directee who is being stripped of her false self. She weeps at the love of God in doing this work.”<sup>16</sup> It is holy work, done in holy love, for the sake of our holiness. Helping a directee to remain in the desert in ways that are emotionally and spiritually safe (praying with them for spiritual protection while they’re vulnerable, reassuring them that this difficult work is about God’s love for them), and then helping them to be more deeply attentive to God and his work in them, will ensure that the desert becomes a place of life.

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<sup>14</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Random House Pub, 1981), 16, 20.

<sup>15</sup> RN, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, September 2008.

<sup>16</sup> CT, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, November 2008.

The following handout is designed for use by a directee on a retreat around themes of Desert Detachment. It's most effective if used after some basic teaching on the Releasing stage, and on God's work in the desert.

### Figure 1: Desert Testing

#### Desert 'Testing': Dying to (temptation of) the False Self, and Living into (shaping of) the True Self

*Through the questions below, prayerfully explore the nature of your false self, letting the Holy Spirit reveal what he wants to be putting to death in you. The quotes on the second page may be helpful for further reflection.*

Thinking of "desert" experiences as any time when you feel *the abandonment of the desert*, be it a physical desert, an emotional desert, a vocational desert, an economic desert, a relational desert, a desert of time or space, or a spiritual desert, reflect on the following questions:

1. In "desert" experiences, what do you most fear?
  
2. In going through a "desert" experience, what is it in you that's laid bare?  
  
Underneath that, what else is exposed?
  
3. From these reflections, try to describe your "false self", the self you reveal to the world but that has to die in the desert. (What shapes your identity? What do you hide behind to give you a sense of value, meaning, or purpose? Where do you find your security? What do you try to control? In a phrase, what do you love more than God?) Note also what your "religious false self" looks like.

**Figure 1: Desert Testing (cont.)**

4. How are you tempted to rationalize what God's revealing, or simply to run away, taking a shortcut back to the false security of your false self?
  
5. Glance over your desert reflections above. How is God at work in these? What is he revealing? What does He want to be putting to death?

**True Self:**

As God strips away and reveals and puts to death your false self, what does he want to be bringing to life? What true self may God be shaping in you, loving into full life? What might your true self look like?

**QUOTES for REFLECTION**

*The false self finds its identity in power, prestige, achievement, possessions, doing... The true self finds its identity in being, and being with and in God...* (Thomas Merton, paraphrased)

*The way of the true self is always the way of humility. Pride and arrogance move us toward our false self, but humility and love allow us to live the truth of our being.*  
( David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 98)

*Solitude [desert] is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self....*

*Solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather, it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born...*

*In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me – naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken – nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something....*

*That is the struggle. It is the struggle to die to the false self. But this struggle is far, far beyond our own strength. Anyone who wants to fight his demons with his own weapons is a fool. The wisdom of the desert is that the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ....*

*We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with him and him alone. Our primary task in solitude, therefore, is not to pay undue attention to the many faces which assail us, but to keep the eyes of our mind and heart on him who is our divine savior. Only in the context of grace*

### Figure 1: Desert Testing (cont.)

*can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature. As we come to realize that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us, that he is our true self, we can slowly let our compulsions melt away and begin to experience the freedom of the children of God....*

*We have, indeed, to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw every day, shake off our compulsions, and dwell in the gentle healing presence of our Lord.*

(Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 16-21)

*The true self is that part of myself revealed in Christ. It is the person I was originally created to be: my gifts, strengths, passions, interests as well as my truest capacity to love, extend compassion, and offer hospitality. The false self is the part of myself that I have created or was created in my upbringing that is not true to the person God meant for me to be. In many ways our false self is more evident than our true self. In part, this is because my true self is revealed in God's own time and usually within community.” (Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 180)*

*Your true self has been hidden in Christ from all eternity... As we become more and more like Christ, we become more our own true self... The true self is who, in reality, you are and who you are becoming... as you are created by God and as you are being redeemed in Christ. It is the image of God that you are.... We do not find our true self by seeking it. Rather, we find it by seeking God....*

*God’s will for us is that we live out the harmonious expression of our gifts, temperaments, passions, and vocations in truthful dependence on God. Nothing less than this is worthy of being called our true self....*

*Our vocation is grounded in the self that from eternity God has willed that we be. Our calling is, therefore, to become that self and then to serve God and our fellow humans in the distinctive ways that will represent the fulfillment of that self. Our identity is not simply a possession. It is a calling.*

*In Christian spiritual transformation, the self that embarks on the journey is not the self that arrives. The self that begins the spiritual journey is the self of our own creation, the self we thought ourselves to be. This is the self that dies on the journey. The self that arrives is the self that was loved into existence by Divine Love. (David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, in *Conversations* 1:2, 24-25)*

### Prayer in the Dark Night

Occasionally a person undergoes an extreme form of detachment, experiencing what feels like the absence of God. This is Releasing in its deepest form. John of the Cross called it “the dark night of the soul,” distinguishing between an “active purgation of the senses,” in which a person voluntarily engages in practices of release and purgation in order to move beyond reliance on sensory intermediaries in his or her experience of God, and a more passive purgation, a “privation” that was “done in it [the soul] by God, a

condition that is night to the soul.”<sup>17</sup> It is apophatic spirituality (“beyond image”) rather than kataphatic (“according to image”), based on the absence of sensory experiences rather than their presence, but it is still Christian spirituality. The dark night has been experienced by God’s people through the ages, and even praised by them for how it “sets the soul free,” as John of the Cross writes.<sup>18</sup>

In times of unintentional relinquishment, prayer as we have traditionally experienced it may seem to fail us. God may not feel close at all; prayer itself may feel like talking to a blank wall. Gerald May explains,

Prayer is never really separate from the rest of life, so the passive night of the senses brings a similar change in one’s spiritual activities. Prayer that used to be full of consolation and peace may now seem empty and dry. Worship and other church activities are not as rewarding as they used to be. It is increasingly difficult to maintain daily ‘active’ practices like prayer, meditation, journaling, or spiritual reading. In general, one finds oneself losing interest in the spiritual things that used to offer so much gratification. Even the images of God one has depended upon may gradually lose their significance.<sup>19</sup>

In times of Releasing, particularly when our prayer is desert-like, we often find ourselves giving up on trying to pray. However prayer is more important than ever at such times. Just as when depression causes a suppression of appetite yet we continue to eat for the sake of maintaining strength and health, so too do we need to pray when we’re in a desert place with God. The prayer may not feel satisfying, but it’s important to engage in it.

However, the way we pray might shift. At such dry times, simpler prayers are more effective. Many writers note that during dry times written prayers can be helpful; we don’t need to figure out what to say to God, or to come up with something that we

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<sup>17</sup> John of the Cross, “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” in Bernard McGinn, ed, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), 74.

<sup>18</sup> John of the Cross, *Essential Writings*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 87.

“feel;” it’s enough to pray along with the wider Church, letting their prayers carry ours.

This “common prayer” is both a praying of the same prayers that the Church universal is praying—using resources such as *The Book of Common Prayer*,<sup>20</sup> for instance, or *The Valley of Vision*,<sup>21</sup> or one of Reuben Job and Norman Shawchuck’s *Guides to Prayer*<sup>22</sup> — and a praying in community, in the presence of others, letting them come up with the words to pray for us.

Simple prayers of recollection and remembrance are helpful at such times. In reorienting our attention to God and praying what we remember of his faithfulness in the past, we’re encouraged to trust in that faithfulness for the present, as we see in Psalm 77:

I cried out to God for help;  
I cried out to God to hear me.  
When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;  
at night I stretched out untiring hands,  
and I would not be comforted.  
I remembered you, God....  
I thought about the former days,  
the years of long ago;  
I remembered my songs in the night....  
Then I thought, ‘To this I will appeal:  
the years when the Most High  
stretched out his right hand.  
I will remember the deeds of the Lord;  
Yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.  
I will consider all your works  
and meditate on all your mighty deeds.’  
Your ways, God, are holy,...  
You are the God who performs miracles....” (Psalm 77:1-3, 5-6, 10-14).

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<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Bennett, ed, *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1983); Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for All God’s People* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1990); Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 2003).

The second of the two *examen* question categories may be helpful during Releasing times as well, allowing the person who may not feel God's closeness in traditional ways to nonetheless identify moments of God's love breaking in through the sensory fog. "When today (or this month, or this season) were you aware of beauty? When did you feel a little glimmer of love, or of belonging, or of being understood?" As a person identifies such moments, we can encourage them by noting "Perhaps that was God, whispering his love to you even in this time of darkness."

### **The Loving Presence of God**

Here we see the heart of the Releasing rhythm. Felt experience to the contrary, rather than being about the absence of God, it's about the presence of God—a loving God who desires deep communion with us, and who will lead us deeper into that communion precisely by removing what comes between us, even our sensory experiences of him. Thus John of the Cross, in the famous poem that gave the name to the experience we call "the dark night," describes the place of apophatic prayer (prayer without sensory aid) as deep communion with God:

On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings...  
I went forth....  
Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,  
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!....  
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck  
And caused all my senses to be suspended.<sup>23</sup>

Apophatic experiences do, then, lead us back to kataphatic ones (prayer with sensory experiences and images), as Ruusbroec notes:

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<sup>23</sup> *Dark Night of the Soul*, ed Peers, Prologue Stanzas 1,5,7, on pages 29-30.

Here such a person meets God without intermediary, and an ample light, shining from out of God's Unity, reveals to him darkness, barenness, and nothingness. He is enveloped by the darkness and falls into a modeless state, as though he were completely lost; through the barenness he loses the power of observing all things in their distinctness and becomes transformed and pervaded by a simple resplendence; in the nothingness all his activity fails him, for he is overcome by the activity of God's fathomless love.... This person becomes filled with the fathomless delights and riches of God. From out of these riches there flow... an embrace and a fullness of felt love, and from this fullness of felt love there flows into the heart and into the corporeal powers a felt and deeply penetrating savor.<sup>24</sup>

Thus it is that the Releasing rhythm itself leads us into the fuller kataphatic life—the felt experiences—of the other rhythms, as we'll see in future chapters.

An understanding of the rhythms of spiritual formation—that there are rhythms, and that one part of the “natural” cycle is the rhythm of seeming emptiness and barrenness—is a tremendous help at such a time. Ultimately it makes the rhythm of Releasing feel safe, when previously it felt like something the person had to grit their teeth and get through in order to get back to God. “Even the darkness will not be dark to you,” the psalmist proclaims, “the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you” (Psalm 139:12).

### **Spiritual Disciplines of Releasing**

When God has a person in the rhythm of Releasing, there are particular spiritual disciplines that may be helpful. As mentioned already, daily *examen* is one, taking time to reflect with discernment on one’s experiences of the day, on feelings or presence or absence, noticing what God may be pruning, or releasing our hold from, or convicting us of. The discipline of confession may be particularly appropriate, in private or with a

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<sup>24</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, “The Spiritual Espousals,” in Louis Dupre and James Wiseman, eds, *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 193-4.

spiritual director. Additional practices during times of Releasing could be those of simplicity, frugality, giving, and silence (as in releasing one's need to be heard). Fasting, in any of its forms, helps us to release attachments in our lives.

Discernment in spiritual direction allows the director, with and on behalf of the directee, to notice the Holy Spirit's holistic care of the soul. At times that means inviting the directee into particular spiritual disciplines that belong more naturally in an opposing spiritual formation rhythm. For someone deep in an experience of Releasing, for instance, practices from the opposite pole of Rejoicing may be important to keep the experience one of hope while in the midst of darkness. Regular reading of Scripture, a natural discipline of Renewing, is as essential to the soul as eating is to the body, and is perhaps most needed when the soul's natural inclination is to starve. Corporate worship, a practice of Rejoicing, can be the place where a person who feels no connection with God may still be in prayer, allowing others' prayers to weave around them.<sup>25</sup>

However, merely encouraging a directee to stay with a spiritual practice during a Releasing time may only further their frustration at the seeming ineffectiveness of the practice. It's most helpful if we help them to adapt the spiritual practice to the lean realities of the Releasing rhythm. "I just have no energy to keep up with my Bible reading, and it doesn't speak to me anyway," a directee may say. "Tell me about how you usually do your Bible reading," you encourage. "Well, I've been reading through the Bible in a year." "Why don't you try just reading a single Psalm each day, or a few verses of a psalm," you suggest, adding "This spiritual rhythm is about simplifying, and clearing out a space in which God may speak... Just as your gardening looks different in

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<sup>25</sup> For a rich exploration of just such an example, see Lauren Winner's chapter on the Jewish practice of grieving, "Avelut/Mourning" in her book *Mudhouse Sabbath* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003).

December from how it looks in May, so too the gardening of your soul. Clean things out, be present to just a little, and wait. God is still doing something, it's just deeper, under the surface, and less visible right now."

### **Seasons of Releasing**

There are certain times of the year when some rhythms and practices seem to come most naturally. A spiritual director should be especially mindful of possible seasonal rhythms if their directee worships in a liturgical tradition, wherein their experience of corporate worship may itself be creating and interpreting a rhythm for them.

I often find directees experiencing feelings of or desire for Releasing during the season of Lent, sometimes intentionally so (if they're practicing forms of fasting, for example) and sometimes without realizing that's what's happening (they might simply feel barren). And some of the richest retreat experiences I've led for people have been annual Advent retreats, in which we prayerfully explore inner awarenesses of longing, waiting, even new birth. Connecting a directee's inner experiences of God with an outer Biblical, historical, and current communal experience of God can give them a framework for understanding God's work, and a picture of what that might look like as they cooperate with him in whatever he's doing, in them, and for his kingdom.

There are also certain times of life when the practices of the rhythm of Releasing are particularly helpful. One of these times, imposed on us rather than chosen, is what we experience in aging. In her work subtitled "Spiritual Directions for the Second Half of Life," Margaret Guenther writes of the "being 'done unto'" that we experience in aging

(and that we resist), challenging us “Yet if Christ’s life is a model and a pattern, we are impelled to see the certainty, indeed the ultimate rightness of this stage of life.”<sup>26</sup> In spite of this Releasing being involuntary, however, Guenther notes the importance of our embrace of it with intentional spiritual practices:

Whether death is approaching us or we are approaching death, the end of life demands its own *askesis*.... Most of us resist even the thought of embracing powerlessness; we prefer action. Ultimately, however, the asceticism for the second half of life—the training program to get in shape, if you will—is linked to powerlessness, even to passivity....

What can those in the second half of life, indeed those in the second half of the second half, build into their rule to embrace what will come? How can we practice? What spiritual muscles must we stretch and strengthen?

As we prepare for our departures, both literal and spiritual, we take hold of each possession and ask: Will I be sustained or pulled under by this attachment? It is a time to take everything out and examine it.<sup>27</sup>

## Waiting in Hope

Noticing Jesus’ voluntary embrace of Releasing reminds us of the attitude with which he took this stance: an attitude of hope. Even in his darkest prayer, the cry uttered in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus modeled a hope-filled, trusting waiting on God.

Similarly, we need to encourage directees who find themselves in times of Releasing to stay with their heart prayers for God (those prayers or wordless groans that cry from deep within their heart, whether they feel they’re being heard or not), and to notice even the slightest shift in those prayers. To the extent to which prayer is two-directional, even if a person isn’t consciously aware of God’s presence, their prayer will

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Guenther, *Toward Holy Ground: Spiritual Directions for the Second Half of Life* (Boston: Cowley Pub, 1995), 75.

<sup>27</sup> Guenther, *Toward Holy Ground*, 74-76.

indeed shift over time, and that shift will be reflective of God's active involvement with their prayer.

For instance, observe the progression in the following conversation between a spiritual director and a directee who's in a dark night experience.

Director: "What's going on in your prayer?"

Directee: "Nothing."

Director: "Has your prayer shifted at all in the past several weeks?"

Directee: "Well, I've stopped asking God to take away my depression."

Director: "Ahh. What do you do or say now?"

Directee: "Nothing. I just sit there."

Director: "What's the feel to the 'sitting there'?"

Directee: "Okay... Calm... Not encouraging, necessarily, but okay."

Director: "Okay as in... ?"

Directee: "Hmm... (pause for several seconds)... I guess it's reassuring."

Director: "Reassuring... As if God's reassuring you?"

Directee: "I hadn't thought of it that way.... Maybe.... Hmm..."

In this conversation, a directee is in a long period of desert prayer. Because their prayer isn't the vibrant communion they've been used to in the past, they assume God isn't meeting them there. But when asked to identify any shifts in their prayer, even if they feel that prayer has been one-way, what they identify can serve to encourage them of God's presence with them. "Staying with" in prayer is extremely important in the Releasing

rhythm, keeping a person in the safe place of with-God practice, and over time helping them to identify Immanuel, God-with-them.

Psalm 130 shows us staying-with prayer:

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord:  
Lord, hear my voice.  
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy....  
I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.  
I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.  
Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.  
He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins (Psalm 130:1-2, 5-8).

The rhythm of Releasing is one of waiting, in hope—waiting *for* the Lord, and in that waiting, discovering it as a place of waiting *with* the Lord, in his love. “Alleluia is the song of the desert” writes Thomas Merton.<sup>28</sup> Alleluia, indeed!

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, quoted in John Moses, *The Desert: An Anthology for Lent* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub, 1997), 131.

## CHAPTER 3:

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DIRECTION IN THE RESTING RHYTHM

“My prayer life feels pretty uneventful right now,” a directee might offer at the beginning of a spiritual direction session. “All that exciting stuff from last year, when it seemed like God was speaking directly to me every time I read a Bible verse, has calmed down. I worry that maybe I’m not growing the way I should.” Thus might begin an exploration of the rhythm of Resting.

Releasing and Resting, both being expressions of the detachment pole of the spiritual life, are closely related to each other. Releasing tends to be the more active of the two—involving as it does intentional actions of relinquishment, confession, searching for God in the midst of darkness or confusion. Resting tends to be more passive, the still, attentive stance one comes to after the active processes of Releasing. Releasing might involve more discomfort, whereas a quiet peace characterizes the settledness of Resting.

Often there’s a back-and-forth movement between the two rhythms. A person stops fighting the relinquishments of Releasing and rests into waiting with God; another person, resting trustingly, becomes aware of the next layer of things to release in order to enter into a more trusting rest:

If I sin and am rebellious, help me to repent;  
then take away my mourning and give me music;  
remove my sackcloth and adorn me with beauty;  
take away my sighs and fill my mouth with songs;  
and when I am restored and rest in thee  
give me summer weather in my heart.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Repose,” in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, ed Arthur Bennett (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 297.

As this prayer from the Puritan collection *The Valley of Vision* suggests, the spiritual formation rhythm of Resting is not primarily the rest of sleep. It is a rest of peace, of restoration, of those who know they are forgiven—further, who know they are loved (a discovery often made in the rhythm of Releasing).

At times sleep will need to be part of this rhythm. When we are exhausted from the labors of the kingdom, or from the demands of life in this too-busy world, sleep will overtake us, often when we finally take time to settle into an attentive stance with God.

Here I appreciate the insight of the spiritual director of my colleague, Steve Macchia. This is the rest of a baby, asleep in its parent's arms, watched over with the gaze of love, sung to by a heart full of love. Or, to pick up on an image from the Song of Songs, this is the rest of the beloved, held in the arms of her lover (Song of Songs 2:6, 8:3). For this reason the Christian mystics write often of “the gaze of love” when describing prayer. “In the life of a Catholic priest of France, the Cure d’Ars, Jean Baptiste Vianney,” writes Anthony Bloom, “there is a story of an old peasant who used to spend hours and hours sitting in the chapel motionless, doing nothing. The priest said to him ‘What are you doing all these hours?’ The old peasant said ‘I look at Him, He looks at me and we are happy.’”<sup>2</sup>

There is no more trusting place in the world than being in the arms of someone while you sleep, or resting gaze-to-gaze after the vulnerability of loving intimacy. The rhythm of Resting is a place of trust. In it, the guard stops watching; the soldier removes his sword, the maiden her veil. We become vulnerable, risking all for the sake of love.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970), 94.

## **Invitation to Trust**

Because of the vulnerability and trust that characterize loving communion with God, in spiritual direction we usually use the word “invitation” instead of “command” when speaking of God’s words to us. It is not that we don’t think God has the authority to command, or that we should not obey (there are times, in fact, when we do use this stronger language, particularly if someone is in grave moral or physical or relational or spiritual danger). It is, rather, that the relationship God desires from us is one of love, of trust, of our complete, willing, vulnerable heart-surrender to him. We can obey a command yet still reserve our heart; an invitation, however, is responded to willingly, freely, vulnerably, and in reciprocal love.

Spiritual practices that accompany the rhythm of Resting, then, include anything that fosters this sense of trust: trusting sleep, contemplative prayer, silence, solitude, and surrender, among others. The preeminent of all of these is the practice of Sabbath—entering into God’s rest, practicing a stance and relationship of trust.

## **Spiritual Practice: Sabbath as Creational, Redemptional, and Eschatological**

Sabbath as a principle is creational. We first find it practiced by God as the crown of his creatational efforts: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:2-3).

When God later institutes Sabbath-keeping as a command, he references the creational nature of Sabbath, and his own observance of the practice:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

We are made *for* Sabbath, and made *to* Sabbath; it's part of being made in the image of God.

Hence we look to the record of how God first kept Sabbath for clues as to what it involves for us. Genesis 2:2 tells us that God rested, ceasing from all his work. We, too, then, should cease from whatever constitutes our work of the other six days, and rest. The words “cease” and “rest” are used intentionally, deriving from Marva Dawn’s theologically rich and highly practical exploration of what she identifies as the four biblical rhythms of Sabbath: ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Dawn’s schema had an organic effect on the shaping of Selah’s fourfold spiritual formation rhythms.

The parallels do lead to an intriguing observation: If this organic rhythm, seen in nature and in Sabbath (itself a foretaste of eternity—see Hebrews 4:1, “the promise of entering his rest still stands”), is the same rhythm we’re identifying in our spiritual formation life, then the spiritual formation rhythms themselves are creational. They’re about God working in us to save us from sin and its effects (including our “false selves”),

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<sup>3</sup> See Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

to restore us to who he made us to be (our “true selves”), and, through these rhythms, to be shaping us for eternity.

Notice that the rest that God enjoys is an active rest. In it he looks back on what he has done and delights in it. Abraham Heschel, the great 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish scholar, writes “Three acts of God denoted the seventh day: He rested, He blessed and He hallowed the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3). To the prohibition of labor is, therefore, added the blessing of delight and the accent of sanctity. Not only the hands of man celebrate the day, the tongue and the soul keep the Sabbath.”<sup>4</sup> We have the sense that the Sabbath is a rest of lived enjoyment, as we see God in Genesis 2 and 3 strolling through the Garden, enjoying the cool of the day and the beauty of the creation, and communing with Adam and Eve. Sabbath rest is a rest of refreshment, renewing us in the image of God, and giving us experience of and delight in something of how God intends life in his creation to be. As such, it includes elements of enjoying creation, beauty, and fellowship.

Interestingly, when Sabbath is again referenced in Deuteronomy’s reiteration of the Ten Commandments’ original Exodus utterance, the command to keep Sabbath begins with a similar exhortation and its detailed outworking, but the reason given for keeping the Sabbath has shifted, from the creational ordinance of Exodus to a redemptive ordinance:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a

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<sup>4</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 14.

mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

God chooses to remind the Israelites that even when they've stepped away from their creation Sabbath freedom, as indeed Adam and Eve did, leading to enslavement to sin and, generations later, eventual literal enslavement in Egypt, he brings them back into Sabbath freedom, into their creation Sabbath status as free creatures designed for whole living with God.

Thus part of Sabbath keeping is about being set free from whatever enslaves us—whatever controls or motivates our life besides God. Once free, we are invited more deeply into our inheritance of rest: "...you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you," Moses exhorts the Israelites a few chapters later, "But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety" (Deuteronomy 12:9-10). And generations later, when God's people have indeed settled well into the land, and are living in peace and prosperity, at the historical peak of their political and cultural strength, Solomon prays "Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised" (1 Kings 8:56).

Sabbath rest, something we were created for and redeemed back into, involves freedom for living into our inheritance, into the wholeness and life of the Renewing and Rejoicing rhythms, when we live into kingdom fullness and calling and rejoice in it. Of course, precisely because Sabbath wholeness is about kingdom inheritance, we don't live fully into Sabbath yet; our experiences here and now, even at their richest, are mere foretastes of the eternal Sabbath awaiting: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also rest from their own work, just as God

did from his. Let us therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...” (Hebrews 4:9-11).

Heschel elaborates on this inherited eternity aspect of Sabbath, quoting from the prayer said at the end of Sabbath grace: ““May the All-merciful *let us inherit* the day which will be all Sabbath and rest in the life eternal.””<sup>5</sup>

Thus keeping Sabbath—resting in creational and redemptional ways that are an eschatological foretaste of the eternal rest to come—requires trust. If we stop working for a day (or an hour, or a vacation, or a sabbatical, whatever period of time God regularly invites us into), do we trust that God will continue to uphold us, and our vocations, and the wider world? Do we trust that God will be working out his kingdom purposes even without our help? (Such trust does not deny our gifts or calling; indeed, one awakes from rest into the strength and focus to live into calling; Resting is followed by Renewing and then Rejoicing, the rhythm that’s about calling. But our calling is a fruit of trust, not its negotiated support.)

Further, do we trust that we’ll have an identity that runs deeper than what we accomplish, or who we’re impressing? Do we trust that God is God, and that we are his beloved, receiving his love simply because he made and redeemed us in order to love us and live with us eternally? “Sabbath is … letting go, for one day out of seven, all those parts of our identities and abilities in which we are constantly tempted to find our security and discovering afresh that we are his children and that he is our Father,” writes Mark Buchanan; “It is God’s opportunity to demonstrate to us… his utter trustworthiness.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Heschel, footnote 8 for chapter VIII, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: W Publishing Group/ Thomas Nelson Inc, 2006), 98-99. It’s interesting to note the common themes of identity and security that arise in exploring both Sabbath Resting here, and in the false self/ true self exploration of the rhythm of Renewing. The first movement of Sabbath—ceasing—can be seen as Releasing.

Trust is the stance of the rhythm of Resting, nurtured most deeply in Sabbath practice. Love is its reward. And love is the seedbed of life, which we embrace in the rhythm of Renewing.

### **Prayer in the Resting Rhythm**

Because the rhythm of Resting is closely aligned with the rhythm of Releasing (being experienced, among other things, as a release of activity), directees may often initially confuse the two. “Nothing is happening in my life right now,” someone may say, assuming that God is sleeping on the job. Yet when asked in spiritual direction to explore more deeply what their prayer feels like in that place, they note “It feels restful... *I feel restful, and content.*” “Tell me more about that feeling” asks the director, and the directee adds, “It’s comforting... sort of like being held in God’s arms.”

The sense of nothingness of Releasing Prayer can gradually transform into the calm expectancy of Resting prayer, and eventually into the deep intimacy of contemplative prayer. Psalm 131 characterizes the prayer of the Resting rhythm:

My heart is not proud, Lord,  
my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters  
or things too wonderful for me.  
But I have calmed myself  
and quieted my ambitions.  
I am like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child I am content.  
Israel, put your hope in the Lord  
both now and forevermore.

It's interesting to note that Psalm 131 begins with the Releasing rhythm: the psalmist prays humility, stilling himself from activity into a place of calm. It's a calm that

characterizes the psalmists' body ("like a weaned child," one who doesn't fret and wriggle but rests calmly in its mother's arms), his mind ("I do not concern myself with great matters"), and his heart ("I have... quieted my ambitions"). It is a rest of contentment, of the shared gaze of love. And it's a rest that looks towards the rhythm of Renewing: "Israel, put your hope in the Lord..."

Often entered into through practices of Releasing, often leading to the more active response of Renewing, the prayer of Resting is contemplative prayer. Having been fed through meditation—active reflection on the Word or on other ways in which God is revealing his love and beauty—a person finds himself or herself satiated, as after a full meal, and settles into the enjoyment of pure presence, "the sort of prayer that aims at God in and for Himself and not for any of His gifts whatever, and more and more profoundly rests in Him alone: what St Paul, that vivid realist, meant by being *rooted* and *grounded*."<sup>7</sup>

"There will come a time in my long-term prayer life when the activity of my prayer becomes much less relevant," writes Mark Thibodeaux. "Merely resting in God's presence will be sufficient."<sup>8</sup> Francois Fenelon goes further, writing to a directee: "I will not think that you are growing spiritually until I see that you have become calm enough to sleep peacefully without restlessness. Ask God for calmness and inner rest."<sup>9</sup>

The sleep Fenelon references here, while indeed a physical sleep, reflects an "inner rest," the rest of the heart. The relaxed stance of the Resting rhythm is not the same as being asleep, even though one may find oneself sleeping at first, and then awakening to more attentive presence. Similarly, the relaxed prayer of mutual, loving

<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Concerning the Inner Life* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic* (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 28.

<sup>9</sup> Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart*, 87.

presence is not prayer in which nothing is happening. Resting prayer is the place where one begins to become more deeply attentive to the stirring of God's presence. Anthony Bloom tells the delightful story of an older woman who, having struggled with feeling that nothing was happening in her prayer, took his advice as her priest, and tried to pray restfully while knitting. She recounted,

... then I perceived that this silence was not simply an absence of noise, but that the silence had substance. It was not absence of something but presence of something. The silence had a density, a richness, and it began to pervade me. The silence around began to come and meet the silence in me.... All of a sudden I perceived that the silence was a presence. At the heart of the silence there was He who is all stillness, all peace, all poise.

Bloom concludes, "This could happen to us—if instead of being so intent on doing things, we could simply say 'I am in God's presence, what a joy, let us be still."<sup>10</sup>

Attentive, joy-filled stillness is nurtured in the twin practices of silence and solitude.

### Silence and Solitude

Once a directee has identified being in a Resting rhythm, the task of the director is not to help them become more active, to figure out something to do to either fill their time or help them feel productive. Rather, a spiritual director should encourage a directee to deeper stillness, and to attentiveness to God within that, for this trusting attentiveness is what God is inviting someone into in the Resting rhythm. "This is the essence of a Sabbath heart: paying attention," writes Buchanan; "It is being fully present, wholly awake, in each moment."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970), 93-94.

<sup>11</sup> Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 50.

The mutually supportive spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude are essential to genuine, attentive stillness. “The very first thing we need to do,” writes Henri Nouwen, “is set apart a time and a place to be with God and him alone. The concrete shape of this discipline of solitude will be different for each person depending on individual character, ministerial task, and milieu. But a real discipline never remains vague or general. It is as concrete and specific as daily life itself.”<sup>12</sup>

Evangelicals read the quote above and feel instantly on familiar territory—this is about having a “quiet time!” When faced with a directee who has noted that not a whole lot is happening in their life with God, our fallback advice is “Ah, yes, you need a better quiet time!” By “better” we usually mean a devotional time that is more disciplined, and we recommend practices such as the use of the latest devotional guide, or listening to a new tape from a Christian artist, or mastering a publicized workbook. The rhythms of Releasing and Resting, however, are characterized by barrenness in the usual ways of active praying, and by God’s invitation to the prayer of rest. Most of our directees will need help in learning how to do that.

It begins with solitude—being able to withdraw from distraction. The spiritual direction session itself is an act of solitude—drawing away from others and activity to be alone (together) listening to God, but it must be supported by a place of solitude. Meeting in a distracting public space isn’t conducive to the kind of attentiveness needed to listen to God. One Selah intern, whose first few meetings with a new directee had been in a coffee shop rather than the quiet space set aside in his church for that purpose (the

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<sup>12</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Random House, 1981), 21.

directee felt more comfortable in the non-churchy and even public setting of the coffee shop), noted its effect after a few sessions:

The directee and I meet in a coffee shop and although I can be present to him, it is difficult for me to be present to the Spirit there. This last time it was particularly difficult. I decided that I should say something after our session, but he beat me to it. He also must have been distracted and asked if we could meet at the church instead. Yay! That was a God thing [making us both aware of this need for solitude in our time together].<sup>13</sup>

Solitude then allows space for attentive posture, which begins with slowing down our physical, mental, and verbal activity. Much as wise parents don't try to put children directly to bed immediately after playing tag in the yard, but move towards bedtime with routines that slow the child down, so too does the wise spiritual director slow down the pace of a directee's mental and verbal activity as a direction session begins. A Selah intern noted, of the time with his directees:

I am increasingly aware of the pace of spiritual direction: it's slower, more deliberate and focused. I need to make sure that I come into the session ready to slow down: not react as quickly, to listen more deeply, to allow for silence.... Most of pastoral ministry is quicker and end-focused—meeting, giving advice, helping out.... Spiritual direction has a distinctively different pace (or rhythm) to it. I can increasingly sense it, when I am there, and when I'm not. This actually is helpful in my own devotional time as well—learning, being more sensitive to the pace.<sup>14</sup>

Solitude, and the kind of slowing down that occurs in it (Adele Calhoun identifies “slowing” as a spiritual discipline!<sup>15</sup>), creates space for attentiveness. Silence allows us to actually hear and notice God in our attentive stance. Note one Selah intern’s increasing

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<sup>13</sup> DE, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, April 2009.

<sup>14</sup> BD, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, April 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 78-81. Calhoun notes several very practical exercises to help with slowing down, some of which may be used at the beginning of a spiritual direction session, or recommended to directees for their own daily practice.

awareness of the role of silence in a series of direction sessions over the course of a year of his training:

February 2008:

I am noticing that when I break up the sessions with times of silent prayer new thoughts come to me and the directees. I have not done this in sessions with all directees, but when I do, I notice a difference in the "feel" of the sessions. The temptation to counsel gets in the way. I find that inviting us to spend time in silent prayer, waiting on the Holy Spirit to lead/speak is very helpful.

May 2008:

I find that my own practice of silence is nurturing my sense of presence with directees. I am finding myself being able to listen better to directees out of my own silence.

February 2009:

I am finding that the times of silence really resonate with my spirit. More and more, silence is playing a big role in my time with directees; it's nurturing my sense of presence. In the safe space that it's creating, directees are getting in touch with childhood hurts, and God is beginning to bring healing there.<sup>16</sup>

Adds another Selah intern of one of her directees, "I am aware of the continued deep healing work of the Spirit in this directee—He is present and active in our silences."<sup>17</sup>

In silence we still our own voices, exterior and interior, and are filled with the healing voice of God. Speaking of the relationship between a pastor and someone who comes to him or her for pastoral counseling, in which their way of being together becomes spiritual direction, Henri Nouwen writes:

It is... possible to experience the relationship between pastor and counselee as a way of entering together into the loving silence of God and waiting there for the healing Word. The Holy Spirit is called the diving Counselor. He is actively present in the lives of those who come together to discern God's will. This is why human counselors should see as their primary task the work of helping their parishioners to become aware of the movements of the divine Counselor and encouraging them to follow these movements without fear. In this perspective, pastoral counseling is the attempt to lead fearful parishioners into the silence of

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<sup>16</sup> JT, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, February 2008, May 2008, February 2009.

<sup>17</sup> CT, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, November 2008.

God, and to help them feel at home there, trusting that they will slowly discover the healing presence of the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

## Practices of Trust

And so we're back to the importance of trust. Allowing oneself to remain in such a vulnerable place requires trust. "God invites us to rest," writes Jeannette Bakke, "confident that when we remain in contact, God will let us know everything we need to know."<sup>19</sup> Knowing this, a director whose directee is in the Resting rhythm will encourage that directee in spiritual disciplines that nurture growth in trust.

One Selah intern, noticing herself in a rhythm of Resting, found God speaking to her through her lectio-style Scripture reading of Isaiah 30:8 ("Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you..."): "In other passages, I have felt encouraged to wait patiently for God, and this one is a picture of God waiting for me. And I sort of feel like that is what God is doing now with me. As I feel his encouragement to surrender, I sometimes feel unready to let go, and that God is waiting patiently for me."<sup>20</sup> She adds that the particular disciplines nurturing her own sense of presence to God are "centering prayer, journaling, examens, and Scripture reading."<sup>21</sup>

Additional disciplines of the Resting rhythm include prayers of trust before sleeping, taking contemplative "prayer walks" outdoors (in pace, this is more akin to strolling than to power-walking!), brief table graces of thanksgiving or simple open-handed breath prayers at hourly intervals. Don Postema writes of "eating mindfully,"

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<sup>18</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Jeannette Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 70.

<sup>20</sup> TE, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, March 2008.

<sup>21</sup> TE, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, March 2008.

encouraging his readers “Before eating, contemplate the food; then eat it with awareness.”<sup>22</sup> Such practices can bring us back to a soul posture of trusting God. Note that these “soul postures” are supported by physical postures (lying down, walking slowly, speaking thoughtfully, opening our hands, taking a deep breath, savoring a bite of food). Each time we revisit that posture, we experience the calm awareness of God, immediately present, loving us.

In spiritual direction, the director not only encourages the directee to practice those disciplines that feel invited by God, he or she encourages the directee to notice the presence of God in the midst of their practice (this is not only what spiritual direction is all about, but really what the spiritual disciplines are all about—practices that heighten our awareness of and responsiveness to God and his work in us). “What’s happening between you and God in your contemplative prayer times?” one might ask in the Resting rhythm, and then “Are you noticing any ways in which this practice is affecting other aspects of your life?”

## Practices of Sabbath

Growing in trust in our relationship with God is like taking a deep breath;<sup>23</sup> the rhythm of Resting itself is both restorative and life-giving. Yet as rewarding as the rhythm of Resting is, a spiritual director may find a directee resisting moving into, or remaining in, this rhythm. Contemporary secular culture predisposes us to feeling

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<sup>22</sup> Don Postema, *Catch Your Breath: God’s Invitation to Sabbath Rest* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1997), 56.

<sup>23</sup> This is the central metaphor for the title of Don Postema’s work *Catch Your Breath*; he writes in the book’s Prologue, after inviting his reader to read further, “I hope it makes you wish to take a deep breath of God’s grace, available in Sabbath practices, and to pray with an openness to God’s Holy Breath, who gives us life and peace.” Postema, *Catch Your Breath*, 16.

worthless if we're not accomplishing something; the modern evangelical church culture, with its emphasis on 'achieving for the Kingdom,' can throw guilt into the mix, making the rhythm of Resting a challenging place to be. That's why the underlying theology of this discipline is so important: Sabbath is not a luxury; it is a command. It is not a command because we're weak and need it (though we are, and we do); it is a command because it's part of our being made in the image of God, and being made for eternity. Being invited back into rest is part of God's reforming and transforming work in us, restoring us to who he intended us to be, and preparing us for the eternal Sabbath that awaits.

If a director notices stirrings of invitation to Rest in a directee, he or she may want to encourage the directee to explore the idea of Sabbath. Recommending books or teaching on Sabbath is a way of supporting the rhythm that God is already stirring in the directee. If it's something God is doing, then a directee will most likely return to the next direction session with a clearer sense of what Sabbath might look like in his or her life. (Note that this approach to the spiritual disciplines, in this case Sabbath, makes any given practice an intentional response to something God is doing in the directee, rather than an impersonal imposition from outside, a routine category checked on the list of "successfully mastered spiritual disciplines.")

The following chart lists several categories of Sabbath observance—Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Intellectual, and Relational. Each category references some foundational understandings of the why and how of Sabbath practice within that sphere of life, occasionally including some particular practices within each to help someone think specifically about what Sabbath could look like for their life. Each category also

lists some questions that a spiritual director might ask of a directee if the directee is noticing God's invitation to explore refreshing rest in that particular sphere.

**Figure 2: Principles of Refreshing Rest**

### **PRINCIPLES OF REFRESHING REST**

*Refreshing rest is that which renews us in the image of God, and in which we experience and delight in something of how God intends life in His creation to be.*

#### **SPIRITUAL**

- \*Letting the life of our soul, our deepest self, rest in God's grace, a "trusting rest"<sup>24</sup>
- \*"Beginning the week with a celebration of the resurrection gives the week a focus. It celebrates God's grace as the basis for all that happens in our lives."<sup>25</sup>

*Examen/ Spiritual direction questions:*

*With what, and in what, do you need to trust God? As you do so, how are you experiencing God's grace? How are you experiencing God? What is God like, in this trusting practice?*

#### **PHYSICAL**

- \*Our bodies need a change of pace and place
  - the pace change should restore energy
  - the place change should be an environment that minimizes the clamor of the world and expands our ability to be aware of resting and rejoicing in God's grace
  - to do this successfully, we need
    - a) to "cease the enculturation that so easily entraps us"<sup>26</sup>
    - b) the support of the Christian community

*Examen/ Spiritual direction questions:*

*What Sabbath practices is God inviting you into in terms of physical refreshment? What kinds of activities restore your energy? What makes you more aware of God? What, when you do it, makes you both more rested and more filled with rejoicing? Where do you best do these activities? What would it look like to fit this into your weekly schedule?*

<sup>24</sup> Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 58. See her work, Part II, for full chapter elaborations on all of these categories of Sabbath observance. Dawn identifies the fifth category as "Social;" I prefer to call it "Relational" because it's not simply about being with other people on the Sabbath, it's about *how* we are present with them, in relational ways as well as social structure ways.

<sup>25</sup> Postema, *Catch Your Breath*, 79.

<sup>26</sup> Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 111. With this phrase, Dawn calls us to cease from the ways in which we allow the culture around us to determine how we spend our time, what we deem important, etc.

**Figure 2: Principles of Refreshing Rest (cont.)**

### **EMOTIONAL**

- \*To receive this, we must be rested physically
- \*“Emotional rest is especially induced by whatever calls forth our creativity and spontaneity”<sup>27</sup>
  - being refreshed by beauty (nature, art, music)
  - being refreshed in our imagination (quality art: fiction, films, etc)
  - expressing creativity artistically

*Examen/ Spiritual direction questions:*

*What restores, or enlivens, or expands your heart and your imagination? What calls forth your creativity? If God is inviting you into more of this, what would it look like?*

### **INTELLECTUAL**

*“Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)*

- \*Rest our minds from what usually occupies them
- \*Nourish our minds on Scripture, Christian teaching, and “whatever is true,... noble,... right,... pure,... lovely,... admirable,... excellent or praiseworthy”(Philippians 4:8), including literature, art, and anything else that nourishes them

*Examen/ Spiritual direction questions:*

*What do you normally take in to your mind (in your daily living and vocation)? What would it look like to rest your mind from that, and nourish it in other ways? What is God inviting as far as Sabbath refreshment for your mind?*

### **RELATIONAL**

- \*Personal: time for refreshment in core relationships; being together! (not the enculturation that pulls us apart 6 days a week)
- \*Body of Christ (cf. Acts 2:42-47)
  - being with the Lord’s people on the Lord’s Day!
  - in contexts that are refreshing: small groups for sharing lives; hospitality in homes, etc. (not necessarily “entertaining”—evaluate according to what will refresh you as well as refresh others)
- \*societal
  - we are called to “embrace the world” in Sabbath wholeness, reflecting Jesus’ concern for compassion and mercy on the Sabbath
  - Yet “our observation of the day equips and empowers us physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, financially, and socially—that is, wholly—to minister to the world on the other six days of the week”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 147.

**Figure 2: Principles of Refreshing Rest (Cont.)**

*Examen/ Spiritual direction questions:  
What kind of relational wholeness is God inviting you into? What Sabbath practices can nurture this?*

### **Invitation to Intimacy**

As Marva Dawn notes in laying out the movements of Sabbath from ceasing and resting towards embracing and celebrating, the rhythm of Resting itself leads into the more stirring rhythms of Renewing and the more celebratory rhythm of Rejoicing. But as with all rhythms, it is God who leads us into a time of Resting, and it is God who leads us out.

Precisely because our culture resists rest, and our fallen human nature continues to find identity in productivity, it will be important that a director continue to read the signs of God's invitations, encouraging a directee to remain in the Resting rhythm until God leads him or her out. Too often people try to leave the Resting rhythm prematurely, apologizing for indulging in it in the first place.

Yet deep work goes on in this seemingly passive rhythm, just as happens in the natural world in the season of winter: bulbs push their life-giving roots deep into the ground, and begin to stretch their stalks towards the sun. To pull a bulb out of the ground in January halts its growth, and no true gardener does so.

At its root, the desire for escape may arise from a fear of intimacy. Resting is the rhythm that puts us in touch with God's deep love for us, keeping us lying in his arms while he gazes on us in love. Teresa of Avila calls this "the prayer of quiet," saying,

The will alone is occupied in such a way that, without knowing how it has become captive, it gives simple consent to become a prisoner of God, for it knows well what it is to be the captive of him it loves. O Jesus and my Lord, how valuable is your love to us here! It binds our own love so closely that it is not in its power at this moment to love anything else but you.<sup>29</sup>

When a spiritual director notices growing trust in a directee, a willingness to rest contentedly with God instead of trying to squirm away, the director may encourage deeper vulnerability by asking questions such as “What is the feel of your prayer?” (or “of this space,” or “of this experience”), “What is God like?”, “How is God toward you?”, “What are you feeling right now?”

Just as sap begins to rise in late winter, so too do we begin to notice movement in our prayer in the rhythm of deep Resting. God, in his very intimate love for us, begins stirring deeper life in us, leading us into Renewing. Such intimacy will often be a felt experience, sometimes an ache physically, always a heart-stirring. Mark Thibodeaux describes how, in his own practice of meditative prayer, he experiences the physicality of such attentiveness, comparing it to that experienced by Elizabeth and her son in utero, John the Baptist: “I experience the God within me leaping for joy at himself [in whatever we’ve meditated on]. It is the fetal John the Baptist within Elizabeth’s womb, stirred in the presence of what dwelt inside Mary.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus in spiritual direction, as a directee begins to give voice to what they’re feeling and experiencing in intimate prayer, we might ask them “Might that be God the Holy Spirit in you, feeling this way?” It’s usually a new idea to directees, but one that

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<sup>29</sup> Teresa of Avila, “On the Four Stages of Prayer, Selections from *The Life, Chapters 11-22*, in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed Bernard McGinn (New York: Random House, 2006), 113-114.

<sup>30</sup> Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic*, 158. See Luke 1:39-45.

opens up their own growing discernment of “the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

The Resting rhythm in spiritual direction thus moves a directee from a more active rhythm, be it the “negative” relinquishment action of the Releasing rhythm or the “positive” fruitful living of the Rejoicing rhythm, into a place where they commune with God more deeply, without distraction, and in ways that nurture their intimacy with him. And deeper intimacy with God can only lead one into fuller life and richer love, as Thomas Keating notes of those who find themselves in the dark night:

If they are asked how their prayer life is, they will throw up their hands in despair. Actually, if questioned further, they reveal that they have a great desire to find some way to pray and they like to be alone with God even though they can’t enjoy Him. Thus, it is evident that there is a secret attraction present at a deep level of their psyche. This is the infused element of contemplative prayer. Divine love is the infused element. If it is given a quiet rest, it will grow from a spark into a living flame of love.<sup>31</sup>

God leads us from Releasing into Resting, where, in that most intimate of embraces, he awakens us into the living flame of his love, and we find ourselves being led more deeply still into the Renewing rhythm.

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Co, 2007), 151-152, elaborating on John of the Cross’s writing in *The Living Flame of Love* (stanza III).

## CHAPTER 4:

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DIRECTION IN THE RENEWING RHYTHM

“I don’t know quite how to put this in words,” a directee might say, looking at the director for encouragement. “But it seems as if God is very, very real right now.... All I have to do is close my eyes and he’s there. It’s like I’m seeing things for the first time, when I look around me... like God is there, looking at them with me....!” Thus might begin a direction conversation when a directee is moving into the Renewing rhythm.

After the earlier rhythms of detachment, attachment to God—our loving, energy-filled response to his love—is the movement of the rhythms of Renewing and Rejoicing, and God, the loving source of life, seeds and nurtures new life in us in ongoing ways.

The rhythm of Renewing is experienced as a quickening inside (in the imagery of loving intimacy, this is the quickening of pregnancy after the vulnerability of love-making), a stirring of life (like spring greening after the seeming barrenness of winter), the faint distant hum of something moving after long stillness. One directee compared it to the stage new parents reach several months after the birth of a child, when they finally get enough sleep again: “I feel like my soul is waking up out of its stupor, feeling God’s presence. Words in the Bible resonate when I read them; worship speaks to my heart!”

Aslan is on the move, and we cannot help but respond in hope. As one Selah intern noted of a directee who had been in a self-identified “winter-like season,” “she is aware of ‘seething’ life beneath the surface and is hopeful that God will allow it to ‘burst forth’ soon.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, hope is the stance of this rhythm, hope that comes from the living

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<sup>1</sup> CT, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, December 2008.

God, active in love, doing what God does—transforming the empty winter landscape into pastures filled with flocks, into fields filled with grain. “One thing that stands out in the accounts of all the Christian mystics is that their encounter with God transforms their minds and their lives,” writes Bernard McGinn, highlighting transformation as God’s key activity in this place of our encounter with him; “God changes the mystics and invites, even compels, them to encourage others by their teaching to open themselves to a similar process of transformation.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Experiences of the Renewing Rhythm**

Because the Renewing rhythm is about transformation and new life, it will be experienced as just that—awakened, heightened sensory awareness—awareness of what is happening around us as God acts; awareness of what is happening in us as the Spirit stirs. While this may occur mentally, it will occur with the senses as well, and so the language used to describe this rhythm is often language of feeling and emotion, as well as of physicality. A person moves from an ascetic and apophatic spirituality to an aesthetic and kataphatic one, for new life, like high spring, is fecund, and beautiful. “A person is made whole,” Jonathan Edwards said, “through sensuous awakening to the beauty of the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> Space (emotional, spiritual, even sometimes physical in terms of calendar commitments) that had been cleared out in the rhythm of Releasing, that had been kept still and open and waiting for God in the rhythm of Resting, begins to be filled up as someone moves into the rhythm of Renewing.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard McGinn, ed. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted June 21, 2007 on the Perichoresis website of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders’ cohort, managed by Jeff Brower.

For someone moving into the Renewing rhythm out of a period of Releasing or Resting, one of the first signs of this movement will be stirrings of life in their experiences of prayer. What had felt either dry or calm will begin to feel more active. What had felt dark begins to seem a place of light. "...They do experience a kind of radiance, a flooding of the personality with new light. A new sun rises above the horizon, and transfigures their twilit world," writes Evelyn Underhill of the prayer experience classically known as "illumination."<sup>4</sup>

Even while a person's intentional prayer life becomes more active in the rhythm of Renewing, it will generally expand beyond the formal devotional time that they've set aside for it. Prayer begins to become an ongoing awareness and response to the presence of God in all of life, with all of one's senses. "...Gradually what happens is that the awareness of God grows within you to such an extent that whether you are with people, listening, speaking or whether you are alone working, this awareness is so strong that even if you are with people you will still be able to pray," writes Anthony Bloom.<sup>5</sup>

James Houston writes of "seeing all the things around us in the context of God's presence, whether it be the soaring of a bird in flight, the sound of church bells, the daily routine of work, or the sights, smells, and sounds of the earth around us. All of this heightens our sense of living before God, in praise, thanksgiving and adoration."<sup>6</sup>

Thus just as early spring is a time of awakened senses—sights, sounds, smells, touch, even taste all testify to new life—so too, is the rhythm of Renewing a place of

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<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Mineola, NY: Dover Pub Inc, 2002), 249.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970), 50.

<sup>6</sup> Houston, James M. *The Transforming Power of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship with God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 259.

sensual noticing. It is the aesthetic pole of the spiritual life, all senses alert, noticing and reveling in God. “There is always a strong aesthetical element in salvation. Climbing the mountain with Jesus means coming upon beauty that takes our breath away,” Peterson writes. “The aesthetic impulse in salvation has to do with training in perception, acquiring a taste for what is being revealed in Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

### Spiritual Direction

“Training in perception”—in the early stages of a Renewing rhythm an individual may need some help in noticing and interpreting the subtle stirrings of new life in their experience as being experiences of God’s presence—as prayer.

Sometimes God’s invitations into this rhythm are loud, particularly in new believers. Often, however, they’re very soft, and easy to miss. Like the first signs of spring—a mist of green on vines at the edge of the road, the distant hum of peeper frogs in a pond, heard only if other noise momentarily silences—one has to be looking and listening for them to notice them. Someone looking out over a late winter landscape may only see brown grass or stretches of snow. A companion can say “Look at the snowdrops over there under that tree,” or “Smell! The air has that spring scent to it!” In spiritual companionship, if we as the companion notice stirrings of life, we can help point those out to the directee: “Look! That’s God!”

“It is not easy to be sensitive to the delicate action of the Spirit in this way,” writes Catherine Doherty. “The Spirit moves so very lightly, lighter than the breeze,

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 197.

lighter than the air.”<sup>8</sup> Yet a spiritual director, “a servant who hopes to be a sacrament of God’s presence,”<sup>9</sup> can help to identify the presence and stirring of the Holy Spirit. Frequently the exploration that occurs in spiritual direction itself is the catalyst for a directee’s noticing the Holy Spirit inviting them into the stirrings of new life.

One excellent tool for the noticing that goes on in times of Renewing is desire. If God is stirring something up in a directee, they often first feel that as desire, as Romans 8 expresses in juxtaposing the creation’s groaning, eagerly awaiting (longing for!) freedom (vv.19-22), with our groaning, eagerly awaiting (longing for!) fully embodied resurrection (v.23), and with the Holy Spirit’s groaning in us in intercession for us (v.26), groans that express the longings, the deep desires that we hesitate to put into words. The Holy Spirit knows what these longings are, though, and in his healing ministry, Jesus often asked that they be voiced. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked the blind man at the side of the road in Jericho, who had been crying out only “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” “Lord, I want to see,” the man stated (Luke 18:41).

“I hear a lot of desire in what you’re sharing,” we might observe in spiritual direction. “Tell me more about this. What do you desire from God, or with God?” Often in the prayerful wide-open space of direction, the answer is there, an awareness of the prayer of the Triune God, the prayer with which Jesus is interceding for us at the right hand of the Father and expressing in us through his Spirit’s groans. Longing gives voice to the stirring of new life, helping us notice what God is already praying for us, and what he is simultaneously already bringing into being in us and for us through his Spirit. Even

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine de Hueck Doherty. *Poustinia: Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer* (Combermere, Ontario: Madonna House Publications, 1993), 48.

<sup>9</sup> William A Barry, *Paying Attention to God: Discernment in Prayer* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1990), 45.

the simple questions “Might what you’re noticing be God’s desire for you—God giving you that desire?” and “Have you asked God what he desires for you?” will help a directee to learn God’s voice and invitations at this time.

Janet Ruffing, a professor at Fordham University and writer on spiritual direction, notes that when someone is newly awakening to God’s love, experiencing feelings of desire and longing, they frequently misdirect these desires towards human love as the object of that desire. The spiritual work that God invites at this stage is “recognizing what these desires are about, correctly interpreting them, and directing them toward the Divine.”<sup>10</sup> A spiritual director, noticing the presence of what might be confused as romantic or sexual desire, may say something like “Might that desire actually be for God himself?” and the potentially more confusing yet bedrock “Might that desire actually be God himself, stirring in you with his love for you, his desire for you?” Gerald May notes that God’s longing for us “can be discerned most clearly when our own spiritual hunger arises for no apparent reason. Often it can be seen in retrospect...”<sup>11</sup> As we explore desire in directees, they may discover that what they’re noticing is God himself, reaching out to them in love and prompting their longing response.

The idea of God’s desire for us may be new to most directees. It may be difficult to grasp. If so, it’s helpful to encourage them to look at Jesus’ relationship with his Father; even to look at Jesus’ relationship with his disciples, including John, whose intimacy with Jesus was such that he referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). The following reflection is designed for use on a retreat, as an

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<sup>10</sup> Janet K Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 106.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald May, *Care of Mind Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 24.

encouragement to the retreatant to spend some time basking in God's love, and awakening more deeply to it.

### **Figure 3: Reflection: Loved by God**

#### *Reflection: Loved by God*

##### **Spend some time reflecting on your love-relationship with God.**

Note that the Father's words "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" come to Jesus before he has done anything in ministry. Reflect on your love-relationship with the Triune God without any reference to your vocation or other things you "do" – how does he love you, and how do you love him?

##### **Spend some time "being with" Jesus the way the disciple John did.**

John was always hanging close to Jesus – leaning against him at table, standing close at the cross, walking close to him, running to meet him.

How do you get close to Jesus?

What does his closeness feel like?

Prayerfully examine, with Jesus, how you experience closeness, and how he invites you to do so more.

##### **Imagine you're together with the disciples and Jesus as they share a meal.**

Where are you sitting in relation to Jesus?

Now imagine an empty space next to Jesus. He looks at you, smiling, and invites you over. What do you do? (See John 13:23-25)

Prayerfully journal what happens between you and Jesus.

Much of the language being used here is language of affect: one's feelings, one's inner senses. While the Holy Spirit in us does indeed speak to us, sometimes with feelings ("through wordless groans," Romans 8:26), it's valid to question whether or not what one is sensing is truly of God, particularly in the Renewing rhythm, when, as life burgeons, growing spiritual awareness could seem to outpace cautious theological examination.

One key criterion for discernment as to whether a person's experiences of God are genuine, in prayer and in prayerful living, is to look for the presence of the fruit of the Spirit. If growth is of the Holy Spirit, it will bear the mark of the Holy Spirit. "The authenticity of these experiences lies not in the experiences, but in the transformation of the life as a whole," writes Ruffing. "The director listens with an ear for the signs of liberating grace.... The directees' descriptions of their lives, behaviors, and dispositions embedded in their narratives will disclose the fruits of the divine-human intimacy. Typically, these will be the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit."<sup>12</sup>

Another very basic discernment tool in exploring directees' experiences is to note whether that experience draws them closer to God or not. "The importance of experiences lies not so much in their precise nature as in one's response to them," notes Gerald May, calling his reader to evaluate an experience "in relation to its fruits." He continues, "More deeply, however, we are speaking of remaining attentive to the mystery and reality of God *behind* all phenomena, refusing to allow superficial appearances to distract us from this central concern."<sup>13</sup>

One intern in the *Selah* program described a session when a directee mentioned seeing an eagle, soaring through the sky. The directee recounted a number of significant

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<sup>12</sup> Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction*, 118.

<sup>13</sup> May, *Care of Mind Care of Spirit*, 42-43.

Additional senses may be involved as well: the Christian mystics occasionally describe experiencing scents as they pray; others find using incense an aid to their awareness of being in God's presence. The use of oil or balm, particularly scented ones, with the laying on of hands may add a multi-sensory dimension to prayer. Visually, directees may find themselves responding to beauty with various artistic expressions of prayer. And physically, the surge of what feels like re-awakening life in the Spirit may prompt physical movement in prayer.<sup>15</sup>

### **Spiritual Practice: A Rule of Life**

As with all the spiritual formation rhythms, the Renewing life is very much about what God is doing in us rather than something that we bring about by our own effort. Yet our response to this burgeoning life, this "life of the Spirit," as Peterson phrases it (*Galatians 5:25, The Message*) is crucial. A.W. Tozer, in referring to the great saints through the ages, mentions that they all had one trait in common: they responded to what God was doing in them, cultivating it into deeper life: "... they had spiritual awareness and... they went on to cultivate it until it became the biggest thing in their lives... when they felt the inward longing they *did something about it*. They acquired the lifelong habit of spiritual response."<sup>16</sup>

Tozer's use of the word "cultivating" introduces the metaphor of gardening. Much like a good gardener puts a trellis in place to direct the new growth of spring, a good soul-tender will put a trellis in place for someone's spiritual growth, to keep the garden

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<sup>15</sup> For examples of additional ways in which we may involve our senses in prayer, see Myra Perrine, *What's Your God Language? Connecting with God through Your Unique Spiritual Temperament* (USA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 80-85.

<sup>16</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Pub Inc, 1982), 63, italics are Tozer's.

from becoming a place of chaos. A Rule of Life is the trellis that guides our growth in God.

“A rule of life,” write Marjorie Thompson, “is meant to help us establish a rhythm of daily living, a basic order within which new freedoms can grow. A rule of life, like a trellis, curbs our tendency to wander and supports our frail efforts to grow spiritually.”<sup>17</sup>

Note Thompson’s use of the word “freedoms.” Stepping into a rule of life should not be like going through the military’s Basic Training camp, a place ruled by fear and conformity in order to achieve a predetermined externally imposed discipline. It is meant to be a voluntary adoption of certain patterns of intentional living in response to God’s desire for us, stirring in us. God, the gardener in the vineyard of John 15, knows what practices at any given time in our life will both nourish and strengthen us. In spiritual direction, we help a directee notice those practices that God is inviting, and then step into them.

Based on Thompson’s three questions for forming a rule of life,<sup>18</sup> we may help directees to shape their rule in response to God’s invitations. First, we ask directees what practices they feel most attracted to. It may be helpful to give them a list of various practices such as those found in Appendix C of this work, or to recommend they read Thompson’s *Soul Feast*, Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, or Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.<sup>19</sup> We encourage our directees to note their inner responses as they read: What practices feel particularly inviting? That sense of invitation might very well be

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<sup>17</sup> Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 138.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 141-142.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978). Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988).

from the Holy Spirit in them, inviting them into those particular disciplines because they best fit their personality, or because they'll be what will lead to the most growth at this time in their life.

One intern in the *Selah* program, accompanying a directee who was in the midst of a recovery of joy after months of feeling its loss, noted “We talked about that, what it felt like, what caused both the loss of joy and the recovering of it. I want to talk more about the joy-robbers and the joy-givers in his life, especially the joy-givers—not people as much as activities. What kinds of things restore his joy? And then I want to help him develop a rule of life around the things that bring him joy.”<sup>20</sup>

Second, we might ask directees to reflect on where they feel God is calling them to stretch and to grow; they may at first notice these areas through an internal resistance to a particular practice that they read about. “Bring the matter into your prayer,” advises Thompson; “Why do you feel such resistance to this particular discipline? Does God have anything to say to you about it? A strong negative reaction to a practice... may reveal that you are resisting paying attention to a part of your life in need of healing. Ask God to show you what spiritual disciplines you need in your life right now.”<sup>21</sup>

And third, we ask directees to notice the kind of balance they need in their life, paying attention to their overall need for both personal and corporate practices, for those that nurture their inner life and those that propel them outward, for those that shape them in soul as well as in body, mind, heart, and relationships. Here the example of Saint Benedict is helpful; in writing the Rule for his monastic order (a rule that commonly has come to be viewed as the example of rule-writing for other orders and even for

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<sup>20</sup> BD, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, April 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 142.

individuals), Benedict gives attention to prayer as well as work, to private contemplation in solitude as well as to public relating to fellow monks and to guests, even to how individual spiritual disciplines are to be adapted to different seasons of the year.<sup>22</sup>

However, while a comprehensive rule of life will indeed reflect balance in a directee's life, an adaptation of the rule for a given time when they're in a particular rhythm of the spiritual life may not. Spiritual direction is the place where a good director can help a directee notice not only what rhythm God has them in, but what practices need to be adjusted in order to best meet God there, and to nurture his work in them during that season.

During a time of Releasing, for instance, a directee may need to be encouraged to strengthen their corporate observances, which will act as a lifeline keeping them from spiraling into an eddy of isolation. During a Resting rhythm, a directee may need greater periods of silence to nurture the still place of contemplative prayer. During Rejoicing, when temptations abound to over-commitment, a directee may need to be more intentional about acts of pruning. And during Renewing, a time filled with the stirrings of God-life, a directee will need to make sure there's plenty of space for reflection, for time to attune all their senses to God so that they are living in response to his loving activity rather than living haphazardly. The trellis they establish at this time will continue to guide their growth in healthy ways, ensuring that the life filling the trellis comes from the true Vine. A spiritual director is a listening presence, aiding the directee in noticing Christ in them, the living Vine in whom they abide in this garden of the soul.

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Fry, ed. *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (New York: Random House, Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998).

A rule of life will always be a work in process, a present season lived response to where God has someone and what he's doing in them. "A rule of life," writes Simon Chan, "is about living a life under a certain pattern of discipline in order to achieve ascetical proficiency.... If we keep in view the end to which our rule is directed, we will remain sensitive to the need for enlarging and revising our rule every few years in order to make room for progress."<sup>23</sup> He adds that, while a good rule should fit like a good pair of shoes, those shoes need to be changed periodically. Chan offers some helpful questions to help a director and directee discern God's movement in the directee's life, and to respond accordingly with a fitting rule of life: "How long have we been under the present rule? Has the rule served us well up to this point?" And, in response to a seeming lack of "progress" at any given time, is it "due to a rule whose usefulness has been outgrown or to the 'dark night' period that every Christian encounters in the course of life? ....Are there other possible reasons why we are feeling restive?"<sup>24</sup>

A rule of life is also personal, and suited to each individual not only according to whatever spiritual season they're in but also according to their particular personality, and what nurtures them at any given time of life. "The first thing we have to find out is the kind of practice that suits *our* souls—ours, not someone else's, and now, at this stage of its growth," advises Evelyn Underhill. "You have to find and develop the prayer that fully employs you and yet does not overstrain you; the prayer in which you are quite supple before God; the prayer that refreshes, braces and expands you, and is best able to carry you over the inevitable fluctuations of spiritual level and mood."<sup>25</sup> In spiritual

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<sup>23</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 190, 197-198.

<sup>24</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 198.

<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Concerning the Inner Life* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 39.

direction, we explore not only the presence of God the Holy Spirit, but also how he's continually inviting a directee into prayer as a supple communion with God, both encouraging and expanding their relationship with the lover of their soul.

### **Embracing and Nurturing in the Rhythm of Renewing**

Thomas Merton describes this rhythm of awakening as the full expression of contemplation (notice how the rhythms are flowing into each other—contemplation as both Resting and Renewing): “Hence contemplation is... awakening, enlightenment and the amazing intuitive grasp by which love gains certitude of God’s creative and dynamic intervention in our daily life.”<sup>26</sup> God is at work, shaping us into his image, and when we live in the rhythm of Renewing, we notice and embrace God’s good work in us.

Marva Dawn, in her work on the Sabbath, writes of the Sabbath rhythm of *embracing*, which, since ultimately this wide open space is a foretaste of the Eternal Sabbath, applies to what we’re calling the rhythm of Renewing. This is a place of vibrant new life in Christ, and we respond by embracing all that Jesus is, and all that his Spirit is making us into in him. “To embrace is to accept with gusto, to live to the hilt, to choose with extra intentionality and tenacity.”<sup>27</sup> Choosing with intentionality is the practice of rule of life; living into it with gusto is its fruit of joy.

Like its fellow rhythm of engagement, Releasing, Renewing is a rhythm that in some ways is continually at work in us. Rather like breathing—out and in, out and in, out with other-than-God, in with God—its invitations are part of what we look for in the

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, quoted in McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 548.

<sup>27</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 101.

practice of its particular spiritual disciplines. *Lectio*-style Scripture reading, for instance, helps us to explore God's stirrings: "In your times with the Scriptures," a director might ask, "what have you been noticing? What verses, or passages, or images of Jesus have resonated with your heart?" The practice of daily *examen*, for its part, is one of learning how and when to notice God's nudgings, and as such is a tool in developing a life of daily discernment. As Belden Lane notes in his writing on indifference and attentiveness, such rhythms grow in us the knowledge of when and how *not* to pay attention and when and how *to* pay attention. "Nothing else is more important or more difficult in one's faltering practice of a life of prayer."<sup>28</sup>

Thus it's important that we practice ongoing spiritual disciplines of Releasing, even in—particularly in—times of Renewing. Just as a spring garden needs weeding as well as watering, so too do we need vigilance in keeping clean, free space around the tender new growth in our souls. At times we need to stake this growth, and to fertilize it; hence many of the traditional spiritual practices of this season: Scripture reading, journaling, and spiritual direction. Yet it can be equally important to draw attention to invitations to simplicity and even to confession (the other side of what we notice in daily *examen*). As one Selah intern noted of her directees who happened to be in a time of particularly vibrant new life, "I am sensing the great need for a resting rhythm in each of their lives to balance their growth/new life."<sup>29</sup> Our lived response in the rhythm of Renewing comes out of a multi-faceted attentiveness to God's work in our soul.

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<sup>28</sup> Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 188-189.

<sup>29</sup> CT, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, June 2008.

## Conclusion

“Always He [God] is trying to get our attention, to reveal Himself to us, to communicate with us,” writes Tozer. “We have within us the ability to know Him if we will but respond to His overtures....”<sup>30</sup>

The Christian mystics describe this deepening intimacy with God in physical terms: “...at last finally after much waiting... He enters the bedchamber and occupies the most intimate and secret place,” Richard of St Victor writes, “... He is kissed warmly by love; embraced by delight.”<sup>31</sup> In using the metaphor of physical intimacy to describe the deepening communion of Renewing, we acknowledge that physical union leads to new life and new birth—to the fruitful fullness of the rhythm of Rejoicing, and to our response of joy:

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dreamed.  
Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy.  
Then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”  
The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.  
Restore our fortunes, Lord,  
like streams in the Negev.  
Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.  
Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
Will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them. (Psalm 126)

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<sup>30</sup> Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Richard of St Victor, “The Mystical Ark,” as quoted in Richard J. Foster, *Spiritual Classics* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 185.

## CHAPTER 5:

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DIRECTION IN THE REJOICING RHYTHM

The desert and the parched land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.  
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;  
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy...  
they will see the glory of the Lord,  
the splendor of our God.

—Isaiah 35:1-2

Rejoicing, or celebration, is the felt experience of this fourth rhythm of the spiritual life. It is a natural response to fullness of life in Christ, welling up from within. God brings life; his people rejoice. “My heart rejoices in the Lord,” Hannah sings (1 Samuel 2:1); “...the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit...”(Acts 13:52). Evelyn Underhill writes of the mystics who have experienced this stage, “Many a time has the romantic quality of the Unitive Life—its gaiety, freedom, assurance, and joy—broken out in ‘French-like rejoicings’; which have a terribly frivolous sound for worldly ears... St. Teresa,... like St. Francis, ... had a horror of solemnity.”<sup>1</sup> One Selah intern noted of a directee in the Rejoicing rhythm:

I was taken with a sense of freshness and vitality that she brought with her on this day. It was as if new life was being breathed into her with a force I had never noticed before. She has always inspired me with her energy for life and openness to the Spirit, but she was truly shining in a more focused way than before. Often her energy is all over the place and she seems to present it to me in a carefully manufactured way, but on this day, her energy was bursting forth with clarity, newness, and authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Mineola, NY: Dover Pub Inc, 2002), 440.

<sup>2</sup> GU, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, February 2009.

Rejoicing is the rhythm that's the most visible, the most public, in its manifestations. And it's the easiest to share with others without reserve. Unlike Releasing, which inappropriately understood can make us feel ashamed ("Maybe I've done something wrong, that God is pruning me like this..."), Resting, of which we're apologetic ("I'm usually not this lazy!"), and Renewing ("This stirring of something new feels so holy and vulnerable, I need to hold it close..."), Releasing bursts forth with exuberance and abundance, and is rewarded by our society and church culture alike ("Look at how God is blessing you, you faithful servant!"). Like high summer in the natural world, by its nature the spiritual rhythm of Rejoicing cannot be hidden. It overflows in beauty, and invites all to share in its bounty.

### **The Communal Aspect of Rejoicing**

Hence the rhythm of Rejoicing is a communal rhythm. While springing from the overflow of our hearts, it is lived out externally in engagement with others in the Church and in the world, as many of its accompanying spiritual disciplines reveal: corporate worship, the Lord's Supper, community/fellowship, hospitality, holy leisure, vocation and work, service, stewardship, and world awareness.<sup>3</sup> As such, this celebratory rhythm acts as a corrective to a common assumption we tend to make in spiritual direction, and even in spiritual formation—the assumption that the rhythms of the spiritual life are all interior rhythms, and that the “stuff” of spiritual formation is only about the soul, as well as the assumption that it’s about the individual soul, with no reference to the community in which that soul is nurtured or to the wider community in which we live out our kingdom call. In reality, while God indeed is transforming us from the inside out, the

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C, “Spiritual Disciplines.”

“out” is affected. We are embodied saints, living out our salvation incarnationally in the world in which Jesus took on human form, and to which he will one day return. Here, in our midst, he reveals his glory, and we respond in praise.

### Spiritual Practice: Corporate Worship

Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
— Ps 100:4

The very fullness of the Rejoicing rhythm overflows into praise. And by the nature of its fullness and the visibility of its external fruit, that praise is publicly expressed, in the community of the faithful in common worship. “I say of the godly who are in the land, ‘They are the noble people in whom is all my delight’” (Psalm 16:3), writes the psalmist in a Rejoicing rhythm that celebrates fullness:

Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;  
you have made my lot secure.  
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
surely I have a delightful inheritance....  
You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:5-6, 11)

Our response to God’s goodness in this wide open space of our salvation life, commonly called “worship”—what Foster describes as “Expressing in words, music, rituals, and silent adoration the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God, by means of which we enter the supranatural reality of the *shekinah*, or glory, of God”<sup>4</sup>—is a communal response of joy, expressed with the people of God. And in the Scriptures, this rejoicing in worship

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<sup>4</sup> “Spiritual Disciplines Index—Worship,” in Richard Foster, ed, *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*, NRSV (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2005), 2316.

often takes place around a table. It is one of the central metaphors of the Kingdom, captured by the psalmist in Psalm 23, echoed by Jesus in his celebratory parables of the lost being found (Luke 15) and of the Great Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14), and prefigured in the Last Supper.

Tables are communal places; feasts are communal celebrations. “Christ plays in the community of people with whom we live,” Peterson writes, “and we want to get in on the play.”<sup>5</sup> God’s goodness, God’s deeds, God’s revelation, God’s experienced love—all form the life we share in community; all inform the conversations we share, and our way of conversing. And God’s ultimate revelation of his goodness, his greatest deed, his deepest expression of love, is what we celebrate in community around the table of the Eucharist.

Interestingly, just as we return to the image of entering God’s glory, first noticed when paired with our entering Jesus’ death in the rhythm of Releasing, so in Rejoicing we again return to reminders of dying. It is, after all, Jesus’ death that the Table both reminds us of (“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me,” Jesus enjoins his followers—Luke 22:19) and invites us into (“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” Paul asks—1 Corinthians 10:16). The rhythms of Rejoicing and Releasing, as with all the rhythms of spiritual formation, are intertwined, for together they do the work of God’s shaping us into the image of Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 226.

## Prayer

Particular traits characterize one's prayer in the Rejoicing rhythm: an overflow of praise and thanksgiving, obviously, will be present (reflecting the content of the rhythm); one may also notice the impulse to express these emotions with more of the senses, in song, or motion, or posture (reflecting the incarnational aspects of the rhythm). One may feel more drawn to join others in worship in midweek services (reflecting the corporate nature of the rhythm), or notice a particular energy around intercession (reflecting the outward focus of the rhythm).

While Rejoicing prayer may easily be expressed in the more charismatic free-form prayer that flows naturally out of Rejoicing's energized joy (supernaturally at times, in the expression of tongues!), as prayer that's communally expressed, liturgical prayer fits this rhythm well, joining the pray-er with the wider community of faith, both the Church around the world (for instance, all Anglican churches use virtually the same liturgy each Sunday no matter what part of the world they're in), as well as the Church through the ages (as Richard Foster writes, "we are offering up to the throne of grace the very words that have been prayed by followers of the Way for many generations..."<sup>6</sup>). And the intentionally far-ranging content of prayer within written liturgies can act as a trellis for the exuberant growth of the Rejoicing stage's emotions, ensuring that the Rejoicing rhythm itself remains a healthy one, outwardly focused rather than inwardly indulged.

Thus another dimension of prayer in the Rejoicing rhythm can be called "vocational prayer," or 'kingdom prayer.' Prayers of intercession fit this rhythm, and those scripted in intentionally liturgical worship services ensure that kingdom concerns

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 108.

are covered. One such prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, whose refrain simply requests “Lord, have mercy,” includes the following categories:

- For the peace of the world, for the welfare of the holy Church of God, and for the unity of all peoples...
- For our President, for the leaders of the nations, and for all in authority...
- For this city, for every city and community, and for those who live in them...
- For seasonable weather, and for an abundance of the fruits of the earth...
- For the good earth which God has given us, and for the wisdom and will to conserve it...
- For those who travel on land, on water, or in the air...
- For the aged and infirm, for the widowed and orphans, and for the sick and the suffering...
- For the poor and the oppressed, for the unemployed and the destitute, for prisoners and captives, and for all who remember and care for them...
- For deliverance from all danger, violence, oppression, and degradation...
- That we may end our lives in faith and hope, without suffering and without reproach...
- In the communion of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, and one another, and all our life, to Christ our God...<sup>7</sup>

Intercessory prayer, as far ranging as this, helps us live into our calling to be kingdom priests in the world.

Just as in nature summer fruitfulness comes out of winter fallowness, so too does the active priestly prayer of the Rejoicing rhythm flow out of the quiet prayer of the Resting rhythm. “Active” intercessory prayer is in fact nurtured by the “passive” prayer of contemplation. “... the contemplatives often sense an invitation to pray *with* God, to share God’s joy and sorrow, which in turn God is sharing with all creation,” writes Gerald May; “There is a notion here of ‘keeping God company’ in whatever God is experiencing.... With the unbelievable intimacy the contemplatives claim we have with

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<sup>7</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 383-385.

God, how could it be any other way?”<sup>8</sup> One Selah intern noted, “I find myself being reminded of my directees and praying for them as I go about my daily work—driving, walking to the store, hiking, at the library, while I’m cooking or when I go to sleep or wake up. I am aware of a shared love for each of my directees—it’s as if I am entering to God’s love for my directees and am enjoying that.”<sup>9</sup>

Foster, commenting on Jesus’ words in John 15, ‘If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you’ (John 15:7, NRSV), notes “This ‘abide in me’ is the all-inclusive condition for effective intercession.... As we live this way, we develop what Thomas a Kempis calls ‘a familiar friendship with Jesus.’ We become accustomed to his face.”<sup>10</sup> The face-to-face loving gaze of contemplation, its resting-in-the-arms-of-the-Beloved nature, fills the prayer with life that overflows to others, like streams of water overflowing to a thirsty world (John 7:38-39).

Psalm 149 captures the kingdom nature of Rejoicing prayer. “Praise the Lord,” it begins, “Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people” (v 1). It goes on to express the kind of full-of-life incarnational prayer characterized in this rhythm: “Let them praise his name with dancing, and make music to him with timbrel and harp” (v 3). Then the psalm concludes by calling God’s people to the kingdom intercessory nature of Rejoicing prayer, what Foster calls “a spiritual defiance of the world as it now is:”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 198.

<sup>9</sup> CT, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, October 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 247.

May the praise of God be in their mouths  
and a double-edged sword in their hands,  
To inflict vengeance on the nations  
and punishment on the peoples,  
to bind their kings with fetters,  
their nobles with shackles of iron,  
to carry out the sentence written against them—  
this is the glory of all his faithful people.  
Praise the Lord. (Psalm 149:6-9)

In the rhythm of Rejoicing, our prayer and our work become one, for in it our work, long nurtured in prayer as a calling to serve God in the world, comes into full expression.

“Times of prayer... recenter us and remind us what our daily work is all about and what it is for.... Work becomes a means through which we can know and love God more deeply.”<sup>12</sup>

### Spiritual Practice: Vocation

The life of intimacy with God, shaped and deepened in the rhythms of Releasing, Resting, and Renewing, spills over into engagement with the world; God’s love in us enlarges its embrace to the world around us. “I notice in my directee the movement from communion with God to community with others,” write a Selah intern of a directee in the Rejoicing stage; “In this movement, I see in her the desire to serve others, to explore her vocation and to share in others’ journeys that is common in the theme of Rejoicing.”<sup>13</sup>

Simon Chan confirms such outward movement: “The great Christian mystics never saw love as ‘a private affair between Christ and the individual, but that the real

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis Okholm, *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press [Baker Pub], 2007), 103-106.

<sup>13</sup> GU, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, February 2009.

measure of our love for Christ is our love for others.”<sup>14</sup> Evelyn Underhill notes the same, elaborating on the “unitive” stage that shares some of the characteristics of Selah’s high Renewing and Rejoicing rhythms, “It is the peculiarity of the Unitive Life that it is often lived, in its highest and most perfect forms, in the world”<sup>15</sup> and she quotes from St Teresa of Avila: “*This is the end and aim of prayer, my daughters; this is the object of that spiritual marriage whose children are always good works. Works are the best proof that the favours which we receive have come from God.... To give our Lord a perfect hospitality, Mary and Martha must combine.*”<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, Marva Dawn is able to write of corporate worship, one of the central practices of the rhythm of Rejoicing:

Worship trains its participants to become more thoroughly aware in the rest of their lives that everywhere they go they are on that sacred ground. Thereby worship helps us all know that we play an important part in God’s whole mission in the world; we are essential parts of Christ’s Body and fulfill our calls throughout our lives in holy spaces sanctified by God’s presence through us for the sake of others.<sup>17</sup>

God’s love, deepened into fruitfulness in the Rejoicing rhythm, spills over into the corporate sphere, expressed most fully in worship and in vocation.

It is, therefore, highly appropriate in spiritual direction sessions in which a directee is sharing feelings of Rejoicing (such as “My life is so great right now!” or “I’m feeling deeply thankful!”), to ask “What are you noticing of God in your experiences of

<sup>14</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 100, quoting McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism* (New York, Crossroad, 1991), 78.

<sup>15</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 414.

<sup>16</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 429, quoting Teresa of Avila as footnoted by Underhill: “El Castillo Interior,” Moradas Sétimas, cap.iv.

<sup>17</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 282.

corporate worship? Who is he, and how are you experiencing him?”—thus helping this rhythm be God-focused rather than self-focused. Similarly, one might ask directees who are exulting in their feelings of self-confidence, “Are you sensing any invitations from God in terms of living this out in the world?”— thus helping their growth come into healthy fruition as they live into their vocation.

### **Spheres of Calling in the Vocational Realm**

Issues of discernment that arise in spiritual direction will most often relate to the relational and vocational spheres of our lives. At times our life in these spheres will not have the feel of the rhythm of Rejoicing; indeed there are periods when God calls us into a Releasing of relationships, or vocational commitments, or into a time of Resting in him with those, or into the Renewing of new relationships or vocational calls. When we do find ourselves in the rhythm of Rejoicing, though, it will be one that we are experiencing in relationship to our connection to others, and to the world around us.

Directees in the Rejoicing rhythm may bring questions about calling to their direction relationship. Sometimes these questions are in areas of relational calling: issues relating to their marriage, or a dating relationship, or parenting, or being a child of aging parents. The task of direction may involve helping them explore what faithfulness looks like in those relationships. Interestingly, at such times invitations to humility, surrender, and service (practices more usually associated with the Releasing rhythm) may be what God is speaking into their life.

Sometimes the calling question centers on geography, and a sense of place. Directors may need to help their directees through discernment about God’s call in what

they're noticing: how do they interpret the fact that a particular region of the world continues to come up in their prayer? What does it mean if they find themselves frequently longing to be in the mountains? If they've long had a heart for the inner city, what is that about? Sometimes these noticing are God's invitation to a geographical move and a vocational commitment—as when the apostle Paul was “compelled by the Spirit” to head towards Jerusalem (Acts 20:22); at other times, they’re about where God will refresh their soul in order to sustain their ministry elsewhere—as Jesus’ repeated returns, pre- and post-resurrection, to the lake and hills of Galilee might suggest (see Luke 4:13-14; John 4:1-3; Matthew 28:7-16).

Frequently directees will want to explore calling in terms of the “doing” sphere, using their skills and gifts in service to the church or to the world. Here it’s helpful to use questions from the Examen (see Appendix D, “Examen”). If God is calling them to a particular vocation, it will be accompanied by feelings of life in true-self ways. This is not to say a calling may not be difficult. Working with people in great economic need, or with those served unjustly by societal systems, or with a population devastated by natural disaster is hard work, and at times disheartening. But someone who’s called to it will know an inner rightness in being there, and will discover it to be a place of being-with-God.

The handout below offers some discernment questions for a directee to work through when exploring these spheres of vocational call. It may be used on a retreat, or simply as a prompt for personal journaling or spiritual direction conversation.

**Figure 4: Reflection: Spheres of My Life**

**Reflection: Spheres of My Life**

**~ Relational ~**

In thinking of the key relationships in my life: family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, church community...

In what ways do these nurture my true self, giving me the freedom, encouragement, and challenge to grow into my calling? How may I ask these people to hold me accountable to being an obedient disciple, growing in my gifts and gifted living?

In what ways do these relationships clutter my life, keeping me from being my true self, keeping me from my calling? What may I need to die to, to release in these relationships, in order to grow faithfully into who Christ is calling me to be?

In what ways do I free and encourage these people to be their true selves, growing into their calling?

In what ways am I restricting them from growing into their true selves and calling? What may I need to die to, to release, to help them grow into who Christ is calling them to be?

**~ Place ~**

**Daily Invitations:**

In thinking of the significant places of my life, of my living and my working and my playing and my resting:

What are the places that drain me, not a good-tired but a soul-deadening drain? What about them has this affect on me?

What are the places where I feel the most refreshed, nurtured, and energized? What are the places where I feel the most alive, where my soul is at home? What are the places where I feel the closest to God? What about them makes them this way?

What is God drawing my attention to as I reflect on this – what might be his invitations to intentionality in terms of where I spend my living/working/resting time?

**Figure 4: Reflection: Spheres of My Life (cont.)**

**Kingdom Invitations:**

What are the places that draw my heart? What are some of the needs of these places? Can I see myself there, and if so, doing what? How might these become for me places of Kingdom engagement and service? What might it look like for me to begin to explore this?

**Sabbath Invitations:**

What are the Sabbath places for me, places of soul refreshment? What might God be inviting, in terms of my getting there on a regular basis? What would that look like? How can I keep that time and place “re-freshment” rather than “vacate-tion/escape”?

**~ Giftedness/Doing/Vocational ~**

**Calling Within My Existing Vocation:**

What am I doing that drains me of energy and joy?

What am I doing primarily because of the expectations of others, rather than because I feel drawn there?

Is God inviting me to release any of these, in any way? Is he inviting me to shift anything within these, to free up joy? What might that look like?

**Exploring Calling as an Expression of My True Self**

Thinking back to my happiest memories as a child (under age 12), what was I doing? What about that made me happy, whole, alive? Might there have been a seed of calling in that, and if so, what might it be? How could I get back in touch with that now?

What do I do now that gives me energy, joy, life? When do I most feel “Yes! This is who I am made to be!”

Dreaming ahead to if I could do anything, without current restrictions of time, place, finances, relationships, training, etc... what would it be? What about it would I love?

#### **Figure 4: Reflection: Spheres of My Life (cont.)**

From these three questions (past, present, future), what commonalities do I notice?

##### **Calling as Lived out in the Kingdom**

When I think of the needs of the world around me – people in my life, my church, my community, the wider society, the world – what needs stir my heart? (Note: While you might “feel a burden for” a particular need, stepping into it should not feel “burdensome,” rather surprisingly glad, right, free.)

What one thing could I do now, to open my life to that deeper joy of living out my deep gladness in and for the sake of others?

Reflections such as these, helping people work through senses of vocational call in the various spheres of their life, may help to shape their rule of life. Given their areas of call and commitments, how will they live into them intentionally? It’s also an appropriate time to explore a communal rule of life, for all of us live in community in some way or another, and it’s within community that we live out our call. “A common rule implies that we are not alone in the spiritual exercises,” writes Simon Chan. “No personal rule is strictly private. It is an extension of corporate rule by which we subject ourselves to the rhythm of the church year and the daily office. Our personal rule, therefore, should not be developed apart from the common rule of the church.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 196.

**Figure 5: Corporate Rule of Life**

### **Corporate Rule of Life**

Our corporate Rule of Life might be based around our congregation's shared Covenant, or the vows we make at baptism, or our Vision and Mission statements. Using any of those corporate documents as a framework, our church's leadership body will prayerfully discern what shared practices we commit to in order to help our corporate life to be lived intentionally, in response to God's ongoing call and movement in our midst.

Examples of our shared practices might include the following:

- \* commitment to going through the same devotional guide for part of the year
- \* commitment to attendance at the central core gatherings of the church (ie Sunday worship, annual meeting, and some type of small group, be it educational or fellowship or prayer)
- \* commitment to an aspect of common mission

Our leadership team will also discern what shared practices we need to commit to in order to be attentive to our Rule, such as:

- \* the leadership team engaging in monthly examen around the Rule
- \* taking an annual retreat to reshape the Rule, etc.

Additional categories might include how we act together in regular meetings:

- \* how do we pray so that we're listening to God?
- \* how do we handle conflict?
- \* how do we handle decisions that aren't unanimous?

### **Discernment in Calling**

There are times when all three of these spheres of calling—relational, geographical or place, and vocational or ‘doing’—will seem to counter each other. One may feel called to a particular place and yet his or her spouse has a job elsewhere. Which sphere of calling trumps, the relational or the geographical/vocational? Clearly the kind of covenant vow made in marriage carries more weight than a vocational call, but does deciding to stay with a spouse and lose the chance for the ministry position that seems so

right mean that he/she has missed his/her chance to live into God's vocational call?

Contrastingly, if God has placed someone in a healthy, mutually supportive extended family who live near each other in a particular part of the country, and then seems to call that person to a vocation in another part of the country, what does obedience look like?

Questions like this reveal the Rejoicing rhythm, for all its fullness and fruitfulness, to be just as much a place of growth in trusting God as are the other rhythms. Simply by asking "What does it look like to trust God with this desire?" (or "this relationship," or "this job"), a spiritual director can help a directee to step into what appears to be God's calling, while continuing to explore the yet-to-be-revealed areas that God has waiting. Following God's clear call in one sphere may indeed mean sacrifices in another sphere, but trusting God with those sacrifices enough to continue looking for what that stirring was all about will lead to new places of true-self life in even those areas as well.

One's theology of eternity is extremely helpful in explorations such as these. Just as a directee might conclude "You know, I do need to let my spouse take this job because I think God is calling him/her to it, and I need to go with him/her even though it means changing jobs myself—somehow I think God is saying 'trust me with this,'" so too a spiritual director may ask a directee: "I wonder how much of your longing to be doing that particular thing in your life is about something God has for you later?" And even, "I wonder if something about that is about eternity—something you won't fully experience now, but may live into in eternity." Words begin to fail at this point in the exploration, but God's reality opens up before us, and we find ourselves in Selah space, where worship and calling and fullness in all areas of life dance together with the Trinity.

## Holistic Care in the Rejoicing Rhythm

Life in the Rejoicing stage can be very much about ongoing discernment, which requires ongoing focused attentiveness. In spiritual direction, part of the task at this stage is to keep a directee focused on their own attentive practices, so that the very fullness of their life doesn't lead to a diluted attention (and eventually diluted energies and a diluted life). Evelyn Underhill charged a group of clergy whom she'd been invited to speak to with the following matter:

But this perfect harmony of inward [intimacy with God] and outward [vocation lived into in the world] is the privilege of spiritual maturity and no one will achieve it who does not make a definite place each day for the feeding and deepening of direct communion , the stretching and strengthening of the soul. How then are *you*, in your special circumstances, going to weave together prayer and outward action into the single perfect fabric of the apostolic life?<sup>19</sup>

Intentional prayer, deepening one's communion with and reliance on God, will help to keep someone in the rhythm of Rejoicing from the particular pitfalls of this stage of abundance. Temptations to over-commitment abound; as does pride at one's own giftedness and accomplishments; the busyness and distractions of a full life can undermine the very things that have nurtured someone into this fruitful stage—the regular intake of, and meditation on, God's word. Thinking of spiritual disciplines as garden tools, and the season of Rejoicing as high summer, we become aware of the need to keep the garden weeded! "Disciplines... have the character of garden tools," writes Marjorie Thompson. "They help keep the soil of our love clear of obstruction. They keep us open to the mysterious work of grace in our heart and our world. Then enable us not only to

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<sup>19</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Concerning the Inner Life* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 78.

receive but to respond to God's love, which in turn yields the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.”<sup>20</sup>

Simon Chan notes that the disciplines themselves are not the fruitfulness we look for in Rejoicing. Rather they are practices that lead to transformation in our character, which is the goal of all the growth we've been experiencing throughout the rhythms of our life in Christ: “Spiritual disciplines are recognized as the means of grace and virtues as the products of grace.”<sup>21</sup> Such growth in virtue keeps the fruitfulness of the Rejoicing life an organic fruitfulness that comes from God, rather than a false one artificially created by our human efforts.

Precisely because this rhythm is so corporate, and so active, it will be important while in it to practice some of the disciplines of the rhythms of Releasing and Resting. Silence can give us the space we need to ascertain that indeed we are correctly discerning God's vocational call; confession will undoubtedly be necessary if we are in ongoing relationships with other people. Living fully in the rhythm of Rejoicing without any Releasing of the extras in our life will lead to overstretched energies and relationships; God does need to prune the fruitful branches to make them more fruitful rather than risk their breaking off with over-abundance (John 15). One Selah intern noted that her directee, generally in a Rejoicing stage, had discovered a need for Sabbath practice (usually associated with the Resting rhythm) right in the midst of Rejoicing:

I still see this directee in primarily a Rejoicing rhythm. But, in our last two meetings he has mentioned finding the meaning and value of Sabbath keeping. He talked more this time about a desire to slow down, make time to reflect more which he believes will help keep his ‘la-de-da’ way of moving through life more rooted and examined. He very much wants to cooperate with whatever the Spirit

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<sup>20</sup> Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 84.

desires for his life; he wants to be open and aware of himself, particularly ways he needs to grow.<sup>22</sup>

Rejoicing is the fullness of growth begun in Renewing; fruitful Rejoicing necessitates Releasing and Resting. Always, moving his way amongst us in this space of his forming work by his Holy Spirit is Jesus, weaving his rhythms into us, and weaving us into his life.

When we live in the wideness of God's mercy, "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" in the wide-open space of the "wide and long and high and deep" love of Christ (Ephesians 3:19, 18), we live in Rejoicing, even when other rhythms are working their good in our souls. Rejoicing reminds us of the purpose of the other rhythms—living into the full presence of God, loving him ever more deeply, rejoicing in who he is and in who he is making us into, and serving him well. Here, in this place of the triune God's work in us, and in communion with him, we are united to the community of God:

Christ desired this when he prayed his heavenly Father that all his beloved should be brought to perfect union, just as he is one with the Father in enjoyment, by means of the Holy Spirit (Jn 17:21-23). Thus he prayed and desired that he in us and we in him and in his heavenly Father should become one in enjoyment, by means of the Holy Spirit. And that, I think, is the most loving prayer that Christ ever made for our beatitude.<sup>23</sup>

"One in enjoyment," finding our life in communion with God himself and with his people, in this wide-open space of the loving prayer of God. It is Selah space, where we are at home in eternity.

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<sup>22</sup> TE, Selah 2007-2009 cohort, April 2009.

<sup>23</sup> John Ruusbroec, "The Little Book of Enlightenment," in Bernard McGinn, ed, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), 449.

## **CHAPTER 6:** **EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

In the ministry of spiritual direction, our awareness and interpretation of God's work must be rooted in Scripture, his self-revelation of his ways. It must be centered in Christ, for in exploring our own life in this wide-open space, we are exploring "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), in whom "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form," and in whom we have been "brought to fullness" (Colossians 2:9-10).

Such awareness and interpretation, as it is practiced in spiritual direction, has an intentional goal—maturity into the likeness of Christ, to the glory of God—and an intentional methodology—noticing, trusting in, and responding to the work and invitations of the Triune God. "God is always doing something," Eugene Peterson writes, "An active grace is shaping this life into a mature salvation."<sup>1</sup>

The passage with which we began this exploration is a good one to summarize the rhythms of God's work in us, as he develops us into maturity:

There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit! (Romans 5:3-5, *The Message*)

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 150.

These verses reveal the sanctifying troubles of Releasing, the passion-nurturing patience developed in Resting, the alert expectancy of Renewing, and the generous fullness of Rejoicing, leading us to shout our praise through the entire cycle.

In spiritual direction, being able to identify the Triune God's presence and ways through these spiritual rhythms, month to month and season to season, will help us to discern how to nurture God's work in our directees, through their trusting attentiveness to God and in their responsive practice of appropriate and invited spiritual disciplines.

### **Evaluation Of *Selah*'s Effectiveness as a Trinitarian, Biblical, Contemplative Model**

*Selah* was begun out of a conviction of the need for, and a desire for the benefits of, a spiritual direction training program that is characterized by the following: it nurtures in its interns a foundational spiritual formation understanding of the Triune God and his transformational work in people in ways that reflect biblical theology, which they attend to in contemplative ways (listening to the Holy Spirit) in the central practice of spiritual direction. Hence in evaluating the effectiveness of the *Selah* program, I have sought to measure the *Selah* interns' growth in spiritual theology (particularly their awareness of reflecting biblically on the presence and ways of the Triune God), as well as their growth in contemplative presence in their practice of spiritual direction (their awareness of being able to notice and respond to the Holy Spirit's presence and leading in a spiritual direction session). The following summaries and analysis will seek to demonstrate and evaluate whether such growth occurred.

One year after their graduation from the program, each *Selah* intern in the program's first cohort was given an Evaluation Form. Of the 15 interns in the program,

13 responded. The form fell into 3 categories: Part A asked them to respond with an awareness of who they were (theology and practice) before beginning the *Selah* program. Part B asked them to respond based on their awareness of who they are now, a year after its completion. Part C asked for more general demographic information, as well as offering a few final evaluative self-identity categories. See “Selah Evaluation Form,” below.

**Figure 6: Selah Evaluation Form**

**Selah Evaluation Form**

Please respond to the following questions by noting the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Feel free to add explanatory or elaborative comments after any question if you think they’re needed to make your responses clearer. Please keep such comments brief – this is for an overview evaluation!

For each comment, mark your response, where applicable, on a scale of 1 through 6. (Scale: **1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.**) Feel free to leave a question blank if you truly have no opinion or if you find the question misleading. There will be room at the end of the questionnaire for additional narrative commentary.

**A. In this first part of the evaluation form, please describe your Theology and Ministry Practice during the time just *before* you entered the Selah program:**

1. I considered myself an “Evangelical” in the theological sense of the word (in a personal relationship with God through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and committed to the Scriptures as the revealed, fully authoritative word of God).

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

2. I had a Biblical understanding of who God is and how he works in people’s lives.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

**Figure 6: Selah Evaluation Form (cont.)**

3. I was able to articulate something about who the Trinity is, and how the Triune God is present and active in my times of ministry with others.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

4. I had an understanding of how God works in believers' lives in identifiable, systematic ways that are about rhythms of the spiritual life (regardless of the words or constructs I used to describe those ways).

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

5. I ministered to others one-on-one in ways that were characterized by intentionally listening to God together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

6. When I was with another person in spiritual companionship ways, there were regular moments when we paused to notice and articulate our awareness of God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

7. When I was with another person in spiritual companionship ways, we were comfortable being in attentive silence together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

8. After having been with someone in a time of spiritual companionship, I was able to look back on the time and notice when I had been particularly attentive to and responsive to God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

9. When offering another person spiritual companionship encouragement, my natural way of relating to them was (choose the one you fell into most naturally, if there were no specific expectations of what the role officially was):

**Figure 6: Selah Evaluation Form (cont.)**

Discipling	_____
Mentoring	_____
Accountability	_____
Pastoral counseling	_____
Spiritual direction	_____

**B. In this next part of the evaluation form, please describe your *current* Theology and Ministry Practice:**

10. I consider myself an “Evangelical” in the theological sense of the word.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

11. I have a Biblical understanding of who God is and how he works in people’s lives.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

12. I am able to articulate something about who the Trinity is, and how the Triune God is present and active in my times of ministry with others.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

13. I have an understanding of how God works in believers’ lives in identifiable, systematic ways that are about the rhythms of the spiritual life.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

14. My growth in awareness of these rhythms has helped me in measurable ways in my ministry to others. (If you answer with a 4 or a 5, please comment on how this growth helps you in your ministry.)

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

**Figure 6: Selah Evaluation Form (cont.)**

15. The way in which I read some of the Biblical narratives of God's/Jesus' interactions with others has changed over the past few years. (If you answer with a 4 or 5, please comment on how this is different.)

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

16. I minister to others one-on-one in ways that are characterized by intentionally listening to God together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

17. When I'm with others in spiritual companionship ways there are regular moments when we pause to notice and articulate our awareness of God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

18. When I'm with another person in spiritual companionship ways, we are comfortable being in attentive silence together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

19. After I've been with someone in a time of spiritual companionship, I'm able to look back on the time and notice when I was particularly attentive to and responsive to God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

20. When offering another person spiritual companionship encouragement, my natural way of relating to them is (choose the one you fall into most naturally, if there are no specific expectations of what the role officially is):

Discipling	—
Mentoring	—
Accountability	—
Pastoral counseling	—
Spiritual direction	—

21. I am a spiritual director.

### **Figure 6: Selah Evaluation Form (cont.)**

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

22. I offer intentional spiritual direction as part of what I do in ministry.

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

23. My spiritual direction training has affected how I practice other parts of my ministry (please comment).

Please answer on a scale of 1 though 5:

\* Comments:

#### **Demographics:**

24. Your age category at the time of your completion of the Selah program:

20-35 \_\_\_\_\_

35-50 \_\_\_\_\_

50-65 \_\_\_\_\_

over 65 \_\_\_\_\_

25. Your amount of formalized education in a theological field (any field that had theological or Biblical studies as part of the degree):

Undergraduate classes \_\_\_\_\_

Undergraduate Major \_\_\_\_\_ (Major: \_\_\_\_\_)

Some courses at the Master's level \_\_\_\_\_

Master's degree \_\_\_\_\_ (degree program: \_\_\_\_\_)

Some courses at the Doctoral level \_\_\_\_\_

Doctoral degree \_\_\_\_\_ (field of study: \_\_\_\_\_)

26. Your vocation at the beginning of the Selah program (whether paid or volunteer, whatever defined your work in the world):

Primary role:

Secondary roles:

27. Your vocation now, a year after the end of the Selah program (whether paid or volunteer, whatever defines your work in the world):

**Figure 6: Selah Evaluation Form (cont.)**

Primary Role:

Secondary Roles:

28. Your church affiliation (denomination; network; or independent; please specify):

29. The amount of time you'd been receiving formalized spiritual direction before Selah began (approximate # of months or years):

30. The approximate # of people you now meet with regularly for formalized spiritual direction:

31. Are you now in spiritual direction peer supervisory relationships (ie supervision peer group, or one-on-one supervision)?

32. Please describe Selah's influence, direct or indirect, on how you currently do ministry (just a few sentences):

### **Summary and Analysis of Evaluation Form Responses**

For the summary below of the evaluative questions, I have assigned each of the 13 Evaluation Forms that were returned a letter from A to M. (The interns filled these out anonymously, so the designations A through M indicate the 13 interns.) The interns were asked to respond on a scale of 1 through 5, as follows: #1 Strongly Disagree; #2 Disagree, #3 Neutral, #4 Agree, #5 Strongly Agree. For each question summarized below, I will give the # (1-5) of the interns' responses.

### **Notes on discrepancies**

\* Some narrative responses under “comment” are offered in inconsistent grammar or sentence structure; some appear to be only peripherally related to what was being asked. I have not tried to “tidy” the responses, which are presented here as they were written on the Evaluation Form; occasionally I may add interpretive comments. [*My interpretive comments are italicized, and enclosed in brackets.*]

\* The original Evaluation Form also had a #6 response, meant to be used for a type of “not applicable” response. In transposing the Evaluation form to an electronic version, the explanation of #6 as an option was dropped accidentally, so most respondents appropriately ignored it as a valid response, choosing to answer on a range from 1-5. In one response, however, #6 was used, seemingly to indicate a stronger agreement than a #5 response would be. (See Respondent B, question #13.)

### **I. Growth in Spiritual Theology (particularly the interns’ awareness of reflecting biblically on the presence and ways of the Triune God):**

For this analysis, questions from Part A of the Evaluation Form (describing the interns’ Theology and Ministry Practice during the time just before they entered the Selah program) are compared with questions from Part B of the Evaluation Form (describing the interns’ current Theology and Ministry Practice, one year after completing the Selah program).

**Questions 1 and 10: “I considered/ consider myself an ‘Evangelical’ in the theological sense of the word (in a personal relationship with God through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and committed to the Scriptures as the revealed, fully authoritative word of God).**

Response: before Selah → after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 5→5

B. 5→4 (comment: “I consider myself an Evangelical probably in terms of most doctrine, but my heart/spirit are greatly broadened in how God can and does work, and the entirety of Church tradition that He uses to reveal Himself.”)

C. 5→5

D. 5→5

E. 4→4

F. 5→5

G. 5→5

H. 5→5

I. 5→5

J. 5→5

K. 5→5

L. 5→5

M. 2→3

**Questions 2 and 11: “I had/ have a Biblical understanding of who God is and how he works in people’s lives.”**

Response: before Selah → after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 3→4

B. 5→5

C. 5→5

D. 4→4

E. 4→4

F. 5→5

G. 5→5

H. 5→5

I. 4→5 (comment on answer to question #2: “I give myself a 4 because I didn’t know as much about how God works in people’s lives as much as I thought.”)

J. 4→5 (comment on answer to question #11: “The closer I get to God, the more I realize how little I know about Him.”)

K. 5→5

L. 5→5

M. 4→4

**Questions 3 and 12: “I was able/ am able to articulate something about who the Trinity is, and how the Triune God is present and active in my times of ministry with others.”**

Response: before Selah → after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 3→4

- B.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- C.  $4 \rightarrow 4$
- D.  $4 \rightarrow 4$
- E.  $4 \rightarrow 4$
- F.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- G.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- H.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- I.  $4 \rightarrow 5$  (comment on question #3: "It's the latter part of that statement that I definitely did not have as great an awareness as I thought.")
- J.  $4 \rightarrow 5$
- K.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- L.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- M.  $3 \rightarrow 4$  (comment on question #3: "I have always found the Trinity, by its very nature, very difficult to describe;" comment on question #12: "Still difficult by nature. Paradox.")

**Questions 4 and 13: "I had/ have an understanding of how God works in believers' lives in identifiable, systematic ways that are about rhythms of the spiritual life."**

Response: before Selah → after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

- A.  $2 \rightarrow 4$
- B.  $3 \rightarrow 6$  (comment: "Greatly broadened since my training in Selah, and my actual experience both in and with spiritual direction.")
- C.  $3 \rightarrow 4$
- D.  $3 \rightarrow 4$
- E.  $4 \rightarrow 4$
- F.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- G.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- H.  $4 \rightarrow 5$
- I.  $3 \rightarrow 5$  (comment on question #4: "I had some understanding of such rhythms. So by giving myself a 3 I really mean average rather than 'neutral.' Please adjust to a number you feel is necessary to capture what you need in order to gauge this.")
- J.  $2 \rightarrow 4$  (comment on question #4: "I didn't understand about rhythms.")
- K.  $5 \rightarrow 5$
- L.  $3 \rightarrow 4$
- M.  $5 \rightarrow 5$

**Elaboration in question 14: "My growth in awareness of these rhythms has helped me in measurable ways in my ministry to others."**

Response: after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

- A. 4
- B. 5 (comment: "In pastoral ministry, identifying what rhythms those in my care may be experiencing and how to help them identify and embrace what these rhythms have to offer them in terms of their deepening in God..")
- C. 5 (comment: "I have noticed that in conversations with staff and volunteers in the ministry that I'm involved with that I move into a more open space of asking questions

and listening. I find it fairly easy to move into spiritual direction type conversation without having to make a verbal explanation of where I am headed. It seems to flow easily and I find it helpful in the nurturing of the relationships.”)

D. 3

E. 5 (comment: “The walls of my ‘God box’ are expanded.”)

F. 4 (comment: “Being aware of the rhythms of the spiritual life has given me deeper insight into the working of God in our lives. It has helped me personally as I reflect with God and am aware of God’s movement in my life and as I sit in prayer with my directees.”)

G. 4 (comment: “Able to understand where the person is and what it may mean for them.”)

H. 4 (comment: “I have been able to articulate more clearly and embrace more fully the way of detachment.”)

I. 5 (comment: “I am much more aware of these rhythms now and know the right questions to ask that will help the person identify it themselves without me telling them where they are or what they are experiencing.”)

J. 4 (comment: “I am not as hard on myself or others. I now have a better understanding of the spiritual process. I am not as quick to try to fix another’s (or my own) spiritual problem, but instead try to help them see beyond the obvious and look to see what God is doing or trying to do in them and through them. What is He trying to communicate?”)

K. 5 (comment: “Growth in awareness of rhythms has continued to develop my attentiveness to the Holy Spirit as I am attentive to the spiritual directee I am companioning. As I minister and encourage a person in the rhythm of their season of life knowing that this season will change, especially if it is a dark night of the soul. It is wonderful to see the rhythms as I companion with a person for a longer period of time. I have more reliance on God and less on me.”)

L. 4 (comment: “The better question here is how it has helped others—my ministry becomes more effectual in bringing about real spiritual change as I better listen to the Spirit’s leadings and urgings in the other person, instead of trying to use my own wisdom. The Holy Spirit is a far better change agent than I am. People’s lives are changed more, which in turn helps me in my goal of encouraging change on them.”)

M. 4 (comment: “Instead of being lazy and undisciplined with spiritual disciplines, a directee may be in a season of rest. Maybe he/she needs to rest and listen and stop the ‘should’s.’”)

**Elaboration in question 15: “The way in which I read some of the Biblical narratives of God’s/Jesus’ interactions with others has changed over the past few years.”**

Response: after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 3

B. 5 (comment: “It has gotten richer, deeper, even more personal, and I have been used by God to help others begin to read and experience Jesus in more personal ways.”)

C. 31 [??typo?? probably meant to be a “3”]

D. 4 (comment: “I read smaller portions of Scripture, more slowly and reflectively.”)

E. 5 (comment: “more grace... more heart, less head knowledge”)

F. 3

G. 5 (comment: “I am aware that it is a dialogue with God—in the moment.”)

H. 4 (comment: “I have been more attentive to listen contemplatively to the reading of Scriptures during a church service. (Lectio Divina)’”)

I. 5 (comment: “I am able to put myself in the situation or encounter better in order to experience it at a great heart level. I think I am able to help others do the same.”)

J. 4 (comment: “Sitting with a passage and meditating on it, perhaps through lectio or some other way I now know there is more to what lies on the surface.”)

K. 4 (comment: “Being attentive to what the Holy Spirit was bringing to my attention for that day or time in a lectio divina reading of the passage has brought a deeper relationship and listening to God as I meditate on the Word.”)

L. 4 (comment: “I’m more aware of Jesus’ attentiveness to the Spirit both in His own and in the others around Him.”)

M. 4 (comment: “I read the Bible more piecemeal than I used to (versus big chunks at a time). I also feel the Spirit leads me to passages at different times.”)

#### *[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses reflecting the interns' growth in*

*Spiritual Theology: The fact that all but one person came into Selah already self-identifying as being an evangelical (questions #1, 10), and stayed that way (one person indicated growing in their breadth of understanding about God, which he/she interpreted as a slight decrease in identity as an evangelical) is backed up by their relatively stagnant reporting in terms of growth in biblical theology: Three indicated slight growth in their biblical understanding (questions #2, 11), four in terms of their understanding of the Trinity (questions #3, 12); but none indicated strong growth in theology (if any growth).*

*These results, without reference to further questions in the Evaluation Form, may indicate that Selah failed to teach a strong spiritual theology. They may also, however, indicate that evangelicals (at least those represented in the program) tend to have a strong biblical theology to begin with, and thus they don’t have as far to grow. (Note that almost all of the respondents marked “4” or “5” to describe their theological*

*understanding even before entering the Selah program.) Further analysis of remaining questions in the Evaluation Form may help us to interpret these results.*

*Eight interns (62% of those responding) did report growth in terms of their understanding of how God works through rhythms of the spiritual life (questions #4, 13), four of those indicating significant growth (more than one number's growth on the scale of 1-5). These results seem to suggest that while the interns' pre-existing strong foundational theology (their understanding about who God is) may not have grown much, their applied theology (their understanding about how God is involved in our lives, and their ability to apply that to their ministry to others) did grow, as revealed in their responses to question #14, "My growth in awareness of these rhythms has helped me in measurable ways in my ministry to others;" responses were spread between one #3, seven #4, five #5. The narrative comments that interns wrote in response to this question back up a conclusion of strong growth in this area. Further, the interns' responses to question #15, exploring their growth in how they read Biblical narratives of God's interactions with people, further indicate growth not so much in head knowledge as in applied knowledge, in encountered knowledge of the God who meets them in the Word.]*

**II. Growth in Contemplative Presence in the interns' practice of spiritual direction (their awareness of being able to notice and respond to the Holy Spirit's presence and leading in a spiritual direction session):** For this analysis, questions from Part A of the Evaluation Form (describing the interns' Theology and Ministry Practice during the time just before they entered the Selah program) are compared with questions from

Part B of the Evaluation Form (describing the interns' current Theology and Ministry Practice, one year after completing the Selah program).

**Questions 5 and 16: "I ministered/ minister to others one-on-one in ways that are characterized by intentionally listening to God together."**

Response: before Selah → after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 3→4

B. 4→5

C. 1→5

D. 2→4

E. 3→4

F. 4→5

G. 3→3

H. 4→5

I. 2→5 (comment on question #5: "I felt like I was trying to listen to God myself but I had no concept of what it meant to listen to God 'together';" comment on question #16: "To not feel totally responsible for this has really taken a burden off my shoulders!")

J. 1→3 (comment on question #5: "I never thought about doing that;" comment on question #16: "Sometimes, but usually not so much together. I am not that intentional.")

K. 5→5 (comment on question #16: "Most definitely and joy to help bring people into that listening process.")

L. 3→4 (comment on question #16: "My pastoral ministry is more characterized by listening and attentiveness than it was previously.")

M. 5→4

**Questions 6 and 17: "When I was with another person/ When I'm with others in spiritual companionship ways, there were/are regular moments when we paused/pause to notice and articulate our awareness of God's presence."**

Response: before Selah → after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 2→4

B. 4→5 (comment on question #17: "So exciting and vibrant.")

C. 1→5

D. 2→3

E. 2→4

F. 2→5 (comment on question #17: "I have become very comfortable with silence and listening in all the areas of my ministry. So much more is accomplished when people hear and sense the presence of God and hear His prompting.")

G. 2→3

H. 4→5

I. 1→5 (comment on question #6: "I don't think I had any concept of this.")

J. 1→3

K. 5→5

L. 1→4

M.  $3 \rightarrow 3$  (comment on question #6: “It happened on occasion, but we never did it intentionally or called it that;” comment on question #17: “It still feels strange to initiate silence or say ‘Let’s pause and notice’ instead of just letting those moments happen as they may.”)

**Questions 7 and 18: “When I was/ When I’m with another person in spiritual companionship ways, we were/are comfortable being in attentive silence together.”**

Response: before Selah  $\rightarrow$  after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A.  $2 \rightarrow 4$

B.  $1 \rightarrow 4$  (comment on question #18: “Have experienced God speaking powerfully through the silence together.”)

C.  $1 \rightarrow 5$

D.  $2 \rightarrow 4$

E.  $1 \rightarrow 4$

F.  $2 \rightarrow 5$

G.  $2 \rightarrow 5$

H.  $3 \rightarrow 4$

I.  $1 \rightarrow 5$  (comment on question #7: “There were times when I would ask the person to excuse me while I sort of retreated into silent prayer seeking guidance. This was usually during a counseling session when I would feel stumped. God was always faithful and helped me to discern the next step to take. But it never occurred to me to invite the person to join me as I felt it was my ‘job,’ so to speak.”)

J.  $1 \rightarrow 4$  (comment on question #7: “Never did it;” comment on question #18: “I can’t speak for anyone else, but I know I am comfortable, and I never would have been before.”)

K.  $5 \rightarrow 4$

L.  $1 \rightarrow 4$

M.  $4 \rightarrow 5$

**Questions 8 and 19: “After having been with someone/ After I’ve been with someone in a time of spiritual companionship, I was able/I’m able to look back on the time and notice when I had been/when I was particularly attentive to and responsive to God’s presence.”**

Response: before Selah  $\rightarrow$  after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A.  $2 \rightarrow 4$

B.  $4 \rightarrow 5$

C.  $2 \rightarrow 4$

D.  $2 \rightarrow 3$

E.  $3 \rightarrow 4$

F.  $4 \rightarrow 5$

G.  $4 \rightarrow 4$

H.  $5 \rightarrow 5$

I.  $4 \rightarrow 4$  (comment on question #8: “I always felt that I was depending on the Holy Spirit’s leadings but this was not something I expected from the person I was ‘companioning.’ We did not do this ‘together;’” comment on question #19: “I still need to improve a lot in this area as my schedule usually requires me to get right to the next thing. And yet, I do

find that it eventually happens even if I am not intentional about it. It often comes to me at night when I am winding down, even lying in bed saying final prayers regarding my day.”)

J. 2→4 (comment on question #8: “I only did so very few times in my life;” comment on question #19: “More often I see where I was not attentive. I am still trying to get myself out of the way.”)

K. 5→5

L. 2→4

M. 3→5 (comment on question #8: “I don’t think my self-awareness was there yet;” comment on question #19: “Especially after writing about it, which for me is like prayer.”)

***[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses reflecting growth in the interns’***

***Contemplative Presence in their practice of spiritual direction: As a whole, this category reflects much greater growth than the category about the interns’ spiritual theology. All four sets of questions (measuring the interns’ awareness both before and after their Selah training) seek to get at the same thing, and are merely different ways of describing a practice based on attentive awareness of God’s presence when with another person.***

*In the questions exploring growth in intentionally listening to God together (questions #5, 16): all but two people indicated growth (85% indicated growth), four of them (31%) indicating significant growth (more than one number’s growth on the scale of 1-5). In the questions exploring being able to pause and articulate awareness of God’s presence when with another person (questions #6, 17), all but one intern (92% of those responding) indicated growth, seven of them (54%) indicating significant growth (more than one number’s growth on the scale of 1-5). Questions #7 and 18, exploring being comfortable with being in attentive silence together when with another person, reveal that all of the interns experienced growth in this area, ten of them (77%) experiencing*

*significant growth (more than one number's growth on the scale of 1-5) (One intern, "K," indicated negative growth, from a 5 to a 4, with no interpretive comments added.)*

*Questions 8 and 19, exploring being able to reflect back on a time with someone and notice attentiveness to God's presence, reveal that ten of the 13 interns (77%) identified growth in this area, five of them (39%) indicating significant growth (more than one number's growth on the scale of 1-5).*

*Narrative comments attached to some of the questions further support the conclusion that the interns grew significantly in their contemplative awareness of God's presence in times with others, in experientially measurable ways. This certainly indicates Selah's strength in training interns in contemplative presence. It may also reflect the demographic of Selah's enrollment: Just as, as was reflected in the questions exploring interns' growth in Spiritual Theology, evangelicals tend to come into the training program strong in foundational theology without seeming to have much room to grow theologically, it's very likely that most evangelicals, trained in practices based upon knowledge and practice, speaking and doing, come into the training program with little experience in practices of attentiveness, in listening to and discerning the quiet presence of the Holy Spirit.*

*Further study of interest would be to compare Selah's effectiveness with a different demographic. For instance, if Selah were to train a group of Shalem graduates, I would hope that their Evaluation Forms would reflect strong growth in spiritual theology. I would not expect to see as much growth in contemplative practice, as that would be their strength in coming into the program, although their articulation of who it is they're listening to in direction may sharpen. ]*

### **III. Growth in Identity: Self-Identifying as a Spiritual Director**

**Questions 9 and 20:** “When offering another person spiritual companionship encouragement, my natural way of relating to them was/ is:

**Discipling**

**Mentoring**

**Accountability**

**Pastoral Counseling**

**Spiritual Direction**

Response: before Selah → after Selah

- A. Mentoring→Spiritual Direction
- B. Pastoral Counseling→Pastoral Counseling
- C. Mentoring→Spiritual Direction
- D. Pastoral Counseling→Pastoral Counseling
- E. Mentoring→Mentoring
- F. Pastoral Counseling→Spiritual Direction
- G. Mentoring/Accountability/Pastoral Counseling→Spiritual Direction
- H. Discipling→Spiritual Direction
- I. Pastoral Counseling→Spiritual Direction
- J. Pastoral Counseling→Spiritual Direction
- K. Pastoral Counseling/Spiritual Direction→Pastoral Counseling/Spiritual Direction
- L. Pastoral Counseling→Spiritual Direction
- M. Pastoral Counseling/other(“friend”)→other(“spiritual companion”)/“friend”)

#### **Question 21: “I am a spiritual director.”**

Response: after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 4

B. 5

C. 5

D. 3

E. 4

F. 5 (comment: “It is the part of my ministry that I feel the most comfortable doing.”)

G. 3 (comment: “I desire to offer sp. dir to more people—it’s very difficult finding people to offer it to. So, I see myself as a spiritual director, but I don’t have much opportunity to practice it. The Evangelical church is slow in accepting this. This has been a big disappointment and frustration.”)

H. 5

I. 4

J. 4 (comment: “I consider myself a director even though I have no steady directees at present, only a person who seeks direction every few months on a very informal basis.”)

K. 4

L. 3

M. 3 (comment: “I don’t have a lot of confidence right now, but hope that some day I can step into that role more completely, whatever I call it.”)

**Question 22: “I offer intentional spiritual direction as part of what I do in ministry.”**

Response: after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

- A. 4
- B. 5
- C. 3
- D. 3
- E. 4

F. 5 (comment: “I have found many opportunities for SD in my current ministry.”)

G. 3 (comment: “I desire this to be a much bigger portion of the type of ministry I offer.”)

- H. 5

- I. 4

J. 3 (comment: “Not sure what you mean by ‘ministry.’ I do not have or do ministry in typical church setting. I consider my life as ministry and while I do try to give spiritual direction, people in my area are not so familiar or interested in spiritual direction.”)

K. 4 (comment: “As ‘part’ but not exclusively.”)

- L. 5

M. 3 (comment: “I meet with a few women from church for coffee, individually, on a regular basis. This is all I can do for now.”)

**Question 23: “My spiritual direction training has affected how I practice other parts of my ministry.” (please comment)**

Response: after Selah; scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

A. 4 (comment: “I am able to listen better and help others discern what God is doing in their lives. I find this to be true even when I am not consciously practicing spiritual direction.”)

B. 5 (comment: “It has affected every way of how I walk with Jesus on ‘the Way.’ It has affected my pastoral ministry, not just being a presence in others’ lives, but also seeking the Lord for setting the pace of my own life/spiritual needs...not wanting to be a typical pastor who gets lost in the doing.”)

C. 5 (comment: “See comment on number 14” { “I have noticed that in conversations with staff and volunteers in the ministry that I’m involved with that I move into a more open space of asking questions and listening. I find it fairly easy to move into spiritual direction type conversation without having to make a verbal explanation of where I am headed. It seems to flow easily and I find it helpful in the nurturing of the relationships.”})

D. 4 (comment: “I listen more in prayer and offer times of silent prayer when leading others in prayer. Retreats have taken a more significant place in my yearly schedule and I encourage this also for others. I think I am more watchful for the Holy Spirit in ministry and life conversations and planning.”)

E. 4 (comment: “More understanding of different spiritual styles and in the ways God may be moving.”)

F. 5 (comment: "I bring elements of SD into all my ministry opportunities by always trying to be present to what God is up to in their lives, even when they came in with a particular issue. I am also including, even in my counseling silent times of listening especially around the areas of concern.")

G. 3 (comment: "Gives me a better spiritual framework to help me see/understand things about the person I am meeting with.")

H. 5 (comment: "I listen more contemplatively in most contexts (committee meetings, Bible studies, etc.)")

I. 5 (comment: "The practices of silence, listening, noticing, etc. now permeates all of my ministry with others. I truly do see God as the director and sense greater freedom to not come up with wisdom, answers, insights for people. I wouldn't have guessed it but I find great peace and joy in this.")

J. 5 (comment: "I look at things differently now. Please see answer to #32. Before, I would just do what was needed. Now I see if God is calling me to do it and what is he doing in and through it. I try to let the Holy Spirit do the leading and try to surrender and follow, rather than trying so hard to make it work as I did before. No worries, mate!")  
{Answer to #32: "Since life is ministry, and Selah has changed my life, it has definitely affected how I 'do ministry.' I am more patient with myself and others in the spiritual growth process, even when sharing the gospel. I know that God is in charge, and he is at work in different ways and I look for the ways he is working in the situation, in the person, and in me, and because of that I trust him much more than I did before. I now try to focus on the bigger picture and am more able to do so. I look for possibilities in the situation and the person, how God is working in the situation and what can be. I am more aware of my own strengths and shortcomings as well as those of others and have become more honest with myself as a result. I try to help others to realize they have the freedom to do the same. Before I would just do ministry but now I see it more as partnering with God. I have to listen to Him, and now I know he is speaking all the time. I look for God at work in myself and in others. My view of God has been expanding tremendously. It is not always comfortable, but it is exciting. Selah has helped me see Him differently and has provided me with tools to relate to Him in new ways."}

K. 5 (comment: "I have integrated the things I learned through the training that has touched every area of the ministry. In teaching, soul care, sabbath rest, listening, silence, pastoral care and counsel and training, leading others.")

L. 5

M. 5 (comment: "My ministry is my life. I am more aware of God, myself, and others because of my training, and this brings a greater wholeness to how I see and experience everything.")

**Questions 26 and 27: “Your vocation at the beginning of the Selah program/ Your vocation now, a year after the end of the Selah program (whether paid or volunteer, whatever defined/defines your work in the world):”**

Primary Role; Secondary Role before Selah/ Primary Role; Secondary Role a year later

- A. Pastor; Pastor/ Pastor; Spiritual Director
- B. full-time student; pastoral intern/ pastor; spiritual director
- C. administrative coordinator at church; mentoring women/ administrative coordinator; spiritual director
- D. pastor’s wife, mother; small group ministry team leader, Stephen minister/ pastor’s wife, mother; mobile therapist, small group leader, spiritual director
- E. not spiritually oriented/ unemployed
- F. pastoral staff at local church/ pastoral staff at local church; spiritual director at local church and outside, and overseeing spiritual ministries at a Christian Wellness center
- G. Counselor, Therapist; Microbiologist/ Counselor, Therapist; Microbiologist
- H. teacher; team-builder, living in intentional community/ spiritual director; retreat leader, living in intentional community
- I. pastor; counselor/ pastor; counselor, spiritual director
- J. church ministry, leadership, seminary student/ leadership, in transition
- K. Ministry staff/ Pastor
- L. Pastor/ Pastor
- M. wife and mother; artist, pastoral care/ wife and mother; spiritual friend

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses reflecting growth in the interns’*

*self-identification as Spiritual Directors: Responses to this portion of the Evaluation*

*Form indicate strong identification with spiritual direction as part of the interns’ ongoing life and ministry practice.*

*In their responses to questions #9 and 20, exploring their “natural” way of relating to people in spiritual companionship encouragement (whether discipling, mentoring, accountability, pastoral counseling, or spiritual direction), nine respondents (69%) indicated movement from another way of relating to a spiritual direction way of relating. Similarly, when given the statement “I am a spiritual director,” (question #21), nine respondents (69%) answered with a 4 (“agree”) or a 5 (“strongly agree”). Question #22 made the statement “I offer intentional spiritual direction as part of what I do in*

*ministry,” eight respondents (62%) answered with a 4 (“agree”) or a 5 (“strongly agree”).*

*For the statement “My spiritual direction training has affected how I practice other parts of my ministry,” (question #23), nine respondents (69%) indicated “strongly agree”, and another three responded “agree” (for a total of 92% indicating their endorsement of this statement. (One respondent answered this with a 3, or “neutral.”)*

*Narrative comments indicate the strength of Selah’s influence on the interns’ sense of God’s presence with them in all aspects of ministry, using words to describe it that indicate movement from a “doing for” God in ministry to a “being with God in ministry” stance.*

*Finally, for questions #26 and 27, asking interns to identify their vocation at the beginning of the Selah program and now, a year later, eight of the respondents (62%) indicated that, while they did not consider spiritual direction to be part of their vocation prior to their Selah training, they do consider it to be a part of it now. It’s worth noting that none of the eight identified “spiritual director” as their exclusive vocation, and only one (“H”) identified it as their primary vocation. Spiritual direction appears to be a companion ministry to other aspects of the interns’ vocations, while in no way reducing its positive affect on how they practice those other aspects of vocation. (See narrative comments for question #23.)]*

#### **IV: Growth in General Ministry Practice**

**Question 32: “Please describe Selah’s influence, direct or indirect, on how you currently do ministry?”**

A. “I am now a spiritual director. I find that even when I am not sitting one on one doing spiritual direction, the skills I received during Selah have changed how I do ministry.

Even in my pastoral care role I find myself using these gifts. Selah has truly changed how I listen to people and how I respond to them and to what God is doing in their lives.”

B. “Quite direct, understanding my call to be a pastor was interdependent with my call to be a spiritual director/companion. Sensing a healthy compulsion to have my life and vocation formed by strong principles of Sabbath, Silence, Solitude, Scripture, and of course, the Triune God throughout it all.”

C. “The Selah program has been key both in my spiritual growth but also in the way I do ministry. I find myself looking and listening for ways of interacting with people differently. I meet with people regularly regarding ministry issues either recruiting them or helping them get connected at my church. To be able to direct the conversation in a way that helps the person realize that God desires to communicate with them and that He does that in a myriad of ways reflects a different conversation than I might have had previously. God has also drawn people into spiritual direction with me in their pursuit of either discipleship, counseling or mentoring. I am able to share with them that what I can offer is spiritual direction and that if that is something they are interested in (as opposed to mentoring or discipleship) that I will be happy to meet with them on an ongoing basis. That has been freeing and affirming for me as I feel my calling is to be a spiritual director.”

D. “See question #23.” {Answer to #23: “I listen more in prayer and offer times of silent prayer when leading others in prayer. Retreats have taken a more significant place in my yearly schedule and I encourage this also for others. I think I am more watchful for the Holy Spirit in ministry and life conversations and planning.”}

E. “Deeper, more intimate personal walk with God resulting in a more genuine caring for individuals and respect for where they are in their journey and delight in the creative ways that God deals with and leads them.”

F. “Selah has had a huge influence on my life and ministry. I was on a burnout track in my ministry when I began in Selah. It was so freeing. I am now doing spiritual direction in my ministry as a staff member at my church and am using the principles that I learned in almost all areas of my ministry and in my private life. My training at Selah has opened up many opportunities for me professionally and as I have applied what I learned has significantly helped me personally was well.”

G. “God used Selah to help me re-align my relationship with Him. It had been too much on ‘doing for Him’ and not on ‘being with Him first.’ Ministry now flows out of my times with God.”

H. “Selah provided me with the training, encouragement and support that I needed to clarify my vocational calling as a spiritual director. My work as a spiritual director continues to be refined as I am in peer supervision with many of the people from my Selah cohort.”

I. “Selah not only trained me to have the ‘skills’ to be a good spiritual director, but truly taught me a way of life I had been desperately seeking, without even knowing it. I have been able to lose a lot of baggage from my childhood religion that prevented me from seeing and receiving the richness of spirituality I didn’t know existed. The two years I spent in Selah were the most spiritually transforming I had known in a very long time. The Lord had begun a new work in my life before and during my first and only sabbatical in 2006, which I believe prepared me for the Selah experience. But Selah was a gift that changed my life with God which impacts my ministry in a profound way. I am deeply grateful!”

J. “Since life is ministry, and Selah has changed my life, it has definitely affected how I ‘do ministry.’ I am more patient with myself and others in the spiritual growth process, even when sharing the gospel. I know that God is in charge, and he is at work in different ways and I look for the ways he is working in the situation, in the person, and in me, and because of that I trust him much more than I did before. I now try to focus on the bigger picture and am more able to do so. I look for possibilities in the situation and the person, how God is working in the situation and what can be. I am more aware of my own strengths and shortcomings as well as those of others and have become more honest with myself as a result. I try to help others to realize they have the freedom to do the same. Before I would just do ministry but now I see it more as partnering with God. I have to listen to Him, and now I know he is speaking all the time. I look for God at work in myself and in others. My view of God has been expanding tremendously. It is not always comfortable, but it is exciting. Selah has helped me see Him differently and has provided me with tools to relate to Him in new ways.”

K. “I have grown to love silence and Sabbath rest and have moved from the ‘doing’ to the ‘being’ which has greatly enhanced my ministry and effectiveness. I have been attentive to my own soul care and encourage others in that area. There is more joy and peace as I have continued to develop my listening to the Holy Spirit in my pastoral counseling and ministry as a whole I have grown in my depth of relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

L. “Selah had a significant impact on how I view myself as a pastor. I do not see myself as a spiritual director as much as a pastor who is using the disciplines and methods of spiritual direction in every aspect of my pastoral ministry. I am more attentive to the Holy Spirit not only in counseling/discipleship situations, but in group settings, while I am preparing sermons,... Selah has impacted every aspect of my pastoral ministry, and as a result of my participation in Selah my experience of the Spirit has deepened, for which I am truly thankful.”

M. “See #23.” {Answer to #23: “My ministry is my life. I am more aware of God, myself, and others because of my training, and this brings a greater wholeness to how I see and experience everything.”}

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses reflecting Selah's influence on how the interns practice other aspects of their ministry: As we began to notice in the interns' narrative comments in the preceding section, their narrative comments here indicate Selah's rich influence on the range and depth of the interns' lives and ministries, not only in spiritual direction but in the wider ministries of the church as well. Clearly Selah has brought deeper intimacy in the interns' prayer life, and in how they are aware of God's presence in the midst of ministry situations. This appears to affect how they practice those ministries as well, for a delightful ripple effect. While not quantitative, the highly positive qualitative nature of the responses speaks for the gratifying affect of Selah training on its interns, and on the churches and ministries in which they live out their call.]*

## **V. Current Spiritual Direction Practice and Accountability**

**Question 30: “The approximate # of people you now meet with regularly for formalized spiritual direction:”**

- A. 5
- B. 5
- C. 6
- D. 1-2
- E. 1
- F. 6-7
- G. 2
- H. 4
- I. 2-3
- J. 0-1
- K. 2 (“2 individuals plus two spiritual direction groups”)
- L. 2
- M. 1

**Question 31: “Are you now in spiritual direction peer supervisory relationships?”**

- A. no
- B. yes
- C. yes

- D. yes
- E. yes
- F. "I have been receiving direction, and am in the process of forming a peer group"
- G. yes
- H. yes
- I. yes
- J. no "Since I do not have any regular directees, what would I share?"
- K. yes
- L. no
- M. no

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses reflecting the interns' ongoing practice of spiritual direction: A few years ago I attended a day-long workshop sponsored by Spiritual Directors' International at which Janet Ruffin (director of Fordham University's training program in spiritual direction, and a gifted author and practitioner) spoke about the ministry of spiritual direction. I recall someone asking her how many people who go through training actually become spiritual directors. I recall her answer (undocumented, so based on my memory) that her best calculation put it at under 50%.*

*From Question #30 in the Evaluation Form above, Selah is off to a stellar start in producing a cohort that, a year later, reports 100% of its graduates as practicing spiritual direction! Taking the lower end of the #'s reported by the interns, 37 people now receive individual spiritual direction from the first round of Selah graduates, with more receiving it in spiritual direction groups.*

*At the same time, Selah is concerned about responsible practice of and growth in the ministry of spiritual direction, and so we encourage our graduates to remain in active supervision as long as they're practicing direction, either in one-on-one supervision or in peer group supervision. Question #31 explores this, and indicates that nine of the interns*

*(69%) are now in some form of supervision, with four (31%) not being in supervision, even while offering direction. This is cause for concern, and may suggest the need for ongoing encouragement of graduates.]*

## **VI: Additional Demographic Questions:**

The following questions were asked in order to help interpret some of the findings, as well as to get a sense of the theological background and ministry contexts of the interns.

### **Question 24: “Your age category at the time of your completion of the Selah program:”**

(Respondents are listed as “A-M” after the categories they selected)

20-35: D

35-50: B, D, H, I, M

50-65: A, C, E, F, G, J, K, L

Over 65: --

[Respondent “D” marked both “20-35” and “35-50,” most likely indicating that he/she is 35 years old; I didn’t notice the category overlap until reading the results.]

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION: These responses put 62% of Selah graduates over the age of fifty, and all at or over the age of 35. Subsequent Selah cohorts, in training at the time of this writing, have expanded the age range in both directions, with a few interns under the age of 35 and at least one over the age of 65.]*

### **Question 25: “Your amount of formalized education in a theological field:”**

**Undergraduate classes:**

**Undergraduate Major (specify major):**

**Some courses at the Master’s level:**

**Master’s degree (specify degree program):**

**Some courses at the Doctoral level:**

**Doctoral degree (specify field of study):**

A. Master’s degree (MDiv)

B. Master’s degree (MDiv)

C. Undergraduate classes

- D. Undergraduate Major (Religion)
- E. “No spiritual education”
- F. Undergraduate classes; some courses at the Master’s level
- G. Master’s degree (MA Counseling)
- H. Some courses at the Master’s level
- I. Undergraduate Major (AA Biblical Studies; BA Religion); Master’s degree (Pastoral Counseling)
- J. Master’s degree (MDiv)
- K. Some courses at the Master’s level
- L. Doctoral degree (thesis: Jonathan Edwards)
- M. Undergraduate Major (Psychology); some courses at the Master’s level, and CPE

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses: All of the interns but one indicate some amount of formalized theological education. Ten of them (77%) indicate degrees or courses at a Master’s level. This supports my interpretation of the Spiritual Theology section of the Evaluation Form, in which I suggest that the interns’ relatively low growth (yet high marks) theologically might be due to their entering the program with pre-existing strong theological knowledge.]*

**Question 28: “Your church affiliation (denomination; network; or independent):”**

- A. Presbyterian (PCUSA)
- B. Conservative Congregational (CCCC)
- C. Independent
- D. Presbyterian (PCUSA)
- E. Baptist
- F. CMA
- G. Non-denominational
- H. Conservative Congregational (CCCC)
- I. Non-denominational (“I am an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene, serving in a non-denominational church”)
- J. Non-denominational/Independent Bible-based Home Church
- K. Non-denominational
- L. Evangelical Association
- M. Interdenominational

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses: When held alongside questions #1 and 10 of the Evaluation Form (see above), these responses indicate a demographic of*

*people who come from self-identifying conservative theological contexts. Thus, I would expect them to come into the program with a strong biblical understanding. Similarly, with the church affiliations indicated above, I would not expect this group of interns to have been previously exposed to much contemplative practice or thought from within their church contexts, although they may have discovered it outside sources. The application process to the Selah program does seem to support this phenomenon.]*

**Question 29: “The amount of time you’d been receiving formalized spiritual direction before Selah began:”**

- A. 0
- B. 8 months
- C. 1 year
- D. 0
- E. 2 months
- F. 1 or 2 times
- G. 0
- H. 0
- I. 0
- J. 0
- K. 0
- L. 0
- M. 0

*[ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION of responses: Again, this may reflect the interns’ ecclesiastical settings. It is still uncommon for those in evangelical contexts to have heard of, much less practiced, spiritual direction. As Selah continues to provide trained spiritual directors for the evangelical church, I will expect more of our interns to have experienced spiritual direction before applying to Selah—indeed, I expect many of their directors to be Selah graduates!]*

## **Interpretive Conclusions**

### **Interpretive Conclusions**

Quantitative as well as qualitative data compiled from the Evaluation Form concur: *Selah* does provide training that nurtures in its interns a foundational spiritual formation understanding of the Triune God and his transformational work in people in ways that reflect biblical theology, and the training helps the interns to attend to this God and his transformational work in contemplative ways in the central practice of spiritual direction.

While the interns did not show as much growth in abstract theology as I might have wished, they started out at the high end of the scale with little room for growth as allowed by the Evaluation Form, and the theological growth that their responses on the Form did indicate was practical growth, the applied aspect of spiritual theology. Further, the interns showed considerable growth in contemplative understanding and practice. The interns' narrative responses even more explicitly testify to *Selah*'s life-changing and ministry-maturing effects, not only in their individual relationship with the Triune God but in their various ministry outworkings as well.

How might *Selah* be improved? I'd like to address this on two levels, exploring both how we may strengthen the *Selah* program itself, and then looking at how we may continue to nurture the lives and spiritual direction practice of our graduates.

Programmatically, my own analysis of the interns' evaluations encourages me to strengthen our explicit attention to the implicit theological framework of *Selah*. While most of our interns in the past have come from strong theological backgrounds, we can

neither assume that all future interns will do so, nor that their theological backgrounds will have applied systematic theology to spiritual theology.

In *Selah*'s subsequent second and third cohorts, we have already begun to make one of our teaching presentations each Residency focus on a biblical example of someone offering a spiritual direction presence to another (for instance, Jesus to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24; Eli to Samuel, 1 Samuel 3; Nathan to David, 2 Samuel 12 and 1 Kings 1). As our faculty settle into being a teaching community together, and as our curriculum subsequently settles into a deeper pattern of intentionality, I'd like to see us offer more teaching presentations that include explicit theological reflection as part of what we're communicating. Some examples of this might include adding presentations that expand our biblical and theological teaching on the Trinity, and on growth in sanctification and the development of Christ-like character, providing we can do this without promoting a discipleship style rather than a spiritual direction style of ministry practice. It's a challenge to do this in an integrated fashion, rather than simply pasting a 10-minute catechesis onto the beginning of every presentation, but it's a challenge worth living into, for the program's internal sake as well as for our call to hold the evangelical church's spiritual direction paradigm to solid theological ground.

Additionally, we may explore developing resources that might be used in spiritual direction times, applying biblical prayers or examples to different situations encountered in directees' lives, although we must be careful that these resources are merely held lightly as a pool from which to draw when the Holy Spirit invites, rather than held tightly like a traveling card catalogue that we haul out every time we offer direction. In keeping with our contemplative stance, the ways in which we deepen and draw from our biblical

well even in practice are in response to the Holy Spirit, not tools or techniques that we master in order to guarantee desired outcomes in spiritual direction.

I also see the need to develop follow-up means for nurturing *Selah* graduates in their practice of, and accountability to, the ministry of spiritual direction. Of course we must immediately examine our own sense of mission, and ask if *Selah* itself is responsible for post-training nurture opportunities, and if we currently are able to offer and oversee such opportunities. However, being able to recognize what opportunities are needed, and to pray through our part in that, is a helpful process, and keeps us open to ways in which God may be continuing to shape the ministry of *Selah*, and of Leadership Transformations Inc overall.

At its most foundational level, post-training nurture and accountability involves committing to the life of a supervision peer group (or to one-on-one supervision, if preferred). While *Selah* itself does not currently coordinate peer groups for our graduates, we do model peer supervision in our internal supervision peer group experiences each year, and we explicitly encourage our interns to continue in supervision after they graduate. As the number of our graduates increases, we could compile and maintain a list of the peer groups they're involved in, and on an annual basis share this list with all graduates, as an regular reminder to connect with other practitioners for accountability and nurture.

Another opportunity for nuture—again, requiring effort on our parts but not too much time—would be to periodically produce a *Selah* newsletter, in which we reference resources we've come across (new books on spiritual direction, conferences or retreats we're aware of, and opportunities for connection with the wider world of spiritual

direction, such as the newly formed Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association<sup>2</sup>). As well, I'd love to see us offer an annual *Selah* reunion retreat, combining both the opportunity to experience fellowship and collegial practice-based conversations with fellow graduates, and the experience of a classic retreat pattern of prayerful silence and peer group direction. The February retreat for current *Selah* interns, instituted in 2011, is an early-stage form of such an offering.

As the founder and director of *Selah*, I find God calling me to ongoing growth in my prayerful life with him, experiencing more deeply communion with my loving Father God, continuing to know Christ-in-me and me-in-him better, and learning to listen and respond to the Holy Spirit within me in more immediate ways. Most of what I'm learning makes its way into my prayers for *Selah*. I find myself longing for deeper shared teamwork with *Selah* faculty, which will involve more time spent together in planning and evaluating. It's tempting—and easier, given our faculty's schedules and the cost, in time and in finances, of trying to get us all together—to continue as we have, each bringing our little piece to the Residencies and doing our communication by email. But it's not what I long for, and I wonder if this desire isn't God's invitation to me, to at least try to live into it.

Another temptation yet perhaps invitation lies in the tension between humbly realizing our limits—what we're not called to do—and humbly responding in trust to God's invitations to grow. Out of the place of humility (and, to be honest, a realistic resistance to giving away too much of my energy), I personally have resisted being the “point person” for all *Selah* graduates and their ongoing nurture. Other ministries offer retreats, after all. But is God inviting us, as a program, to expand what we offer—not

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<sup>2</sup> See their webpage, <http://www.ecswisdom.org/index.php/esda>.

only to our graduates, but even perhaps to additional interns (adding, for instance, training in other parts of the country?). If so, is he inviting me to be the point person for all of this? Or is he inviting me to give up control and let others come alongside in these expanded leadership roles? This is all fodder for prayer—and, in *Selah* fashion, contemplative prayer, noticing what God is doing rather than trying to make it happen myself. That is how *Selah* was founded, and it is how we will continue to live faithfully and responsively to the God who is at the center of our *Selah* life.

### ***Selah* as Formative for Eternity**

In addition to demonstrating *Selah's* effectiveness in training its interns to be theologically sound, contemplatively practicing spiritual directors, the Evaluation Forms have revealed another gift that *Selah* brings to those whose lives it transforms. It shapes us for Eternity, helping us learn to move through life trustingly, responding less in fear, resistance, or cluelessness, and more in peace, trust, and love. Someone who has developed a lifetime of noticing invitations to Releasing, and who by Resting into those invitations in trust has learned the trustworthiness of God, the absolute goodness and deeper love that's experienced in so surrendering, will be able to face the ultimate Releasing of death as, indeed, an invitation to greater love and life, to ultimate and eternal Renewing and Rejoicing.

For all of our life this side of Eternity is a preparation for the Real Life that awaits. All that we experience now, as in a one-dimensional existence, will burst into a full three-dimensional sphere at the return of Christ. And what we now sense as a wide-open space is a graced experience of the Real wide-open space, at whose center is the

river of life, the tree of healing for the nations, and the throne of God, with whom we will dwell forever, face-to-face.<sup>3</sup>

C. S Lewis paints this picture in the final book of his *Narnia Chronicles*. As his characters travel “further up and further in” until they come to the center of the real Narnia, one of them declares “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.... Come further up, come further in!”<sup>4</sup>

This is God’s invitation to us. “Welcome into this wide-open space... Let me love you here, and transform you here in the rhythms of our life together. Let this be the place of your life, and my glory, and our love together. Come, further up, and further in, to this wide-open space of my grace and glory!”

That’s cause for rejoicing, indeed! With the company of saints, God’s faithful people from all nations and times, we stand tall, even dance, in this gloriously wide-open space, shouting our praise, in the grace and to the glory of God, Father, Christ, and Holy Spirit!

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<sup>3</sup> See Revelation chapter 22:1-5.

<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1956), 171.

## **APPENDIX A:**

### **SELAH EVALUATION FORM**

Please respond to the following questions by noting the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Feel free to add explanatory or elaborative comments after any question if you think they're needed to make your responses clearer. Please keep such comments brief – this is for an overview evaluation!

For each comment, mark your response, where applicable, on a scale of 1 through 6.  
**(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strong Agree)**  
Feel free to leave a question blank if you truly have no opinion or if you find the question misleading. There will be room at the end of the questionnaire for additional narrative commentary.

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**A. In this first part of the evaluation form, please describe your Theology and Ministry Practice during the time just *before* you entered the Selah program.**

1. I considered myself an “Evangelical” in the theological sense of the word (in a personal relationship with God through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and committed to the Scriptures as the revealed, fully authoritative word of God).

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

2. I had a Biblical understanding of who God is and how he works in people’s lives.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

3. I was able to articulate something about who the Trinity is, and how the Triune God is present and active in my times of ministry with others.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

4. I had an understanding of how God works in believers’ lives in identifiable, systematic ways that are about rhythms of the spiritual life (regardless of the words or constructs I used to describe those ways).

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

5. I ministered to others one-on-one in ways that were characterized by intentionally listening to God together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

6. When I was with another person in spiritual companionship ways, there were regular moments when we paused to notice and articulate our awareness of God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

7. When I was with another person in spiritual companionship ways, we were comfortable being in attentive silence together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

8. After having been with someone in a time of spiritual companionship, I was able to look back on the time and notice when I had been particularly attentive to and responsive to God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

9. When offering another person spiritual companionship encouragement, my natural way of relating to them was (choose the one you fell into most naturally, if there were no specific expectations of what the role officially was):

Discipling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accountability	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pastoral counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spiritual direction	<input type="checkbox"/>

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**B. In this next part of the evaluation form, please describe your *current* Theology and Ministry Practice.**

10. I consider myself an "Evangelical" in the theological sense of the word.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

11. I have a Biblical understanding of who God is and how he works in people's lives.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

12. I am able to articulate something about who the Trinity is, and how the Triune God is present and active in my times of ministry with others.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

13. I have an understanding of how God works in believers' lives in identifiable, systematic ways that are about the rhythms of the spiritual life.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

14. My growth in awareness of these rhythms has helped me in measurable ways in my ministry to others. (If you answer with a 4 or a 5, please comment on how this growth helps you in your ministry.)

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

15. The way in which I read some of the Biblical narratives of God's/Jesus' interactions with others has changed over the past few years. (If you answer with a 4 or 5, please comment on how this is different.)

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

16. I minister to others one-on-one in ways that are characterized by intentionally listening to God together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

17. When I'm with others in spiritual companionship ways there are regular moments when we pause to notice and articulate our awareness of God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

18. When I'm with another person in spiritual companionship ways, we are comfortable being in attentive silence together.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

19. After I've been with someone in a time of spiritual companionship, I'm able to look back on the time and notice when I was particularly attentive to and responsive to God's presence.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

20. When offering another person spiritual companionship encouragement, my natural way of relating to them is (choose the one you fall into most naturally, if there are no specific expectations of what the role officially is):

Discipling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accountability	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pastoral counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spiritual direction	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. I am a spiritual director.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

22. I offer intentional spiritual direction as part of what I do in ministry.

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

23. My spiritual direction training has affected how I practice other parts of my ministry (please comment).

Please answer on a scale of 1 through 5:

\* Comments:

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## Demographics

24. Your age category at the time of your completion of the Selah program:

20-35	<input type="checkbox"/>
35-50	<input type="checkbox"/>
50-65	<input type="checkbox"/>
over 65	<input type="checkbox"/>

25. Your amount of formalized education in a theological field (any field that had theological or Biblical studies as part of the degree):

Undergraduate classes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Undergraduate Major	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some courses at the Master's level	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Major: \_\_\_\_\_)

Master's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	(degree program: _____)
Some courses at the Doctoral level	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Doctoral degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	(field of study: _____)

26. Your vocation at the beginning of the Selah program (whether paid or volunteer, whatever defined your work in the world):

Primary role:

Secondary roles:

27. Your vocation now, a year after the end of the Selah program (whether paid or volunteer, whatever defines your work in the world):

Primary Role:

Secondary Roles:

28. Your church affiliation (denomination; network; or independent; please specify):

29. The amount of time you'd been receiving formalized spiritual direction before Selah began (approximate # of months or years):

30. The approximate # of people you now meet with regularly for formalized spiritual direction:

31. Are you now in spiritual direction peer supervisory relationships (i.e. supervision peer group, or one-on-one supervision)?

32. Please describe Selah's influence, direct or indirect, on how you currently do ministry (just a few sentences):

**APPENDIX B:**  
**RHYTHMS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**

<u>Schema</u>	<u>RELEASING</u>	<u>RESTING</u>	<u>RENEWING</u>	<u>REJOICING</u>
Basic Biblical (Peterson, <i>The Jesus Way</i> )	repent	believe	follow	follow
(Jesus, Matt 16:24)	take up cross, die to self		live to Christ	
(Jesus, John 15)	pruning		more fruitful	
Early Church, desert Fathers and Mothers	detachment/ apatheia ascetic apophatic		attachment (to God) aesthetic kataphatic	
Medieval/ Roman Catholic	purgation	illumination/ union	awakening	union
Sabbath awareness (Dawn, <i>Keeping the Sabbath Wholly</i> )	ceasing	resting	embracing	feasting
other words to describe:	disengagement	trust	engagement attentiveness	celebrating
Spiritual Disciplines (Willard, <i>The Spirit of the Disciplines</i> )	abstinence		engagement	
(general lists of disciplines)	confession	trust, Sabbath	noticing, reflecting	celebrating, worship

## APPENDIX C:

### SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual Disciplines are those practices that we intentionally engage with in a regular way, in response to and to further nurture God's presence, invitations, and work in our life and character.

The list below is partial, and may be added to as additional practices come to mind.

#### **Practices of Releasing**

- \* confession
- daily examen
- reconciliation
- submission
- sacrifice
- secrecy
- simplicity
- frugality
- disciplines of abstinence:
  - chastity
  - fasting
- grieving
- aging

#### **Practices of Renewing**

- \* Scripture reading:
  - Bible study
  - lectio divina ("holy reading")
- spiritual reading
- daily worship/praying the psalms
- seasonal worship/observance
- daily examen/journaling
- spiritual direction
- sensory prayer (posture, dance, song, incense, held cross, etc)

#### **Practices of Resting**

- \* Sabbath
- solitude
- silence
- retreats
- trusting rest
- thankful eating
- attentive exercise
- prayer walks
- candle-lighting
- holy space/doorposts

#### **Practices of Rejoicing**

- \* corporate worship
- the Lord's Supper
- community/fellowship
- hospitality
- holy leisure
- vocation and work
- service
- stewardship
- world awareness

## APPENDIX D: EXAMEN

### **Ignatian categories of Consolation and Desolation**

#### **Consolation**

- light
- peace
- energy, life
- spacious, freedom
- joy, hope, faith
- trust
- maybe risk, but fundamental safety
- God's presence, even if unseen

#### **Desolation**

- darkness
- turmoil, unrest, unease
- sloth, ennui, acedia
- closed in, trapped
- despair (different from sadness)
- fear
- fundamentally unsafe
- God's absence,  
maybe evil presence

**Daily or weekly *examen*:** In praying back over your day or week, one way of noticing God's invitations is to ask "What seemed life-filled, light-filled, energizing, right, joy, filled with love, focusing, true self, close to God?" (Consolation – a sign that you were at that time living in true self ways with the true God, ways of calling and obedience and blessing).

One way of noticing the cautions of the Holy Spirit is to ask "When did I feel darkness, unease, oppression, fear, abandonment, etc?" (Desolation – a sign that you were either in a place of spiritual warfare or of stepping outside of being attentive to God's guidance and will.)

**In a spiritual direction conversation**, as you listen together, notice:

- Are there any common themes or senses of God's activity that we're noticing?
- When do I/we particularly feel God's presence?
- When do I/we particularly lose that feel?
- What are the affective moments, the moments when I/we feel stirred with positive (consolation) or negative (desolation) emotions, responses, or even boredom/disinterest? How might that be the Holy Spirit showing me/us something?

Always pray these through, in conversation with God, listening, and over time. True consolation lasts; false consolation falls away.

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## **VITA**

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